UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THOMAS MAY: MAN OF LETTERS, 1595–1650

ALLAN GRIFFITH CHESTER

A THESIS

IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Although the present study is the first extended account of the life and writings of Thomas May, it is a pleasure to express my thanks to other writers who have dealt more briefly with the subject. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to C. H. Firth, whose admirable article on May in the *Dictionary of National Biography* is as full as limitations of space would permit and furnishes a helpful list of references; and to the various authors and editors of the *Sussex Archeological Collections* and of the publications of the Sussex Record Society, from both of which series I have garnered much scattered material. Miss E. M. Bell-Irving's monograph, *Mayfield*, has been similarly helpful.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas May, who because of the variety and the scholarly cast of his work may best be described as a "man of letters," has not been entirely neglected in modern times. Three of his plays have been honored in modern editions, and the minutiae of this problem or that in connection with the plays have been dealt with painstakingly in the researches of German scholarship. Moreover, May is mentioned in all histories of Elizabethan and Stuart literature, as a rule respectfully, and always with reference to his supposed disappointment at his failure to receive the laureateship upon the death of Ben Jonson. There has been, however, no extended account of his life and writings before the present study. Yet May deserves to be remembered for more than his unsuccessful rivalry with Sir William Davenant. His plays are thoroughly readable and of more than historical interest. As a translator, he was esteemed inferior to none in his own day, and justly so, for his translations have a real literary merit over and above their accuracy. May was the author also of a "continuation" in English and Latin of Lucan's *Pharsalia* which was enormously popular among his contemporaries; the Latin version, moreover, has been highly praised by generations of classical scholars and has enjoyed many modern reprintings. May wrote, besides, two narrative poems on English history which are the latest of the kind which can boast of real literary value. Finally, he wrote two histories of the Parliament and of the Civil Wars which as recently as the last century were frequently referred to as "standard" histories of the period and which are still worthy of respect for the accuracy of their facts and the temperateness of their comment on the party of the opposition, two qualities by no means usual in the political writings of the period. Because in all the variety of this work May shows himself one of the more solid and reputable citizens in the republic of English letters in the first half of the seventeenth century, it has been thought worthwhile to make this study of his life and writings.

May's life affords an excellent example both of the vicissitudes

of the literary profession and of the relative social and economic position of playwright and poet during this period of English cultural and literary history. He was born a gentleman, the scion of a Sussex family which by Elizabeth's time, through thrift and a shrewd application to business, had achieved wealth and the condition of landed gentry. His father, Sir Thomas May, had been enabled, by inherited wealth, to purchase Mayfield, a large manorial estate which had formerly been in the possession of no less a person than Sir Thomas Gresham, the founder of the Royal exchange; and which had its centre in a magnificent house, dignified with the title of "palace" by reason of its originally having appertained to the Archbishops of Canterbury, which "Gloriana" herself had not disdained to honor with her presence upon the occasion of a royal progress through Sussex. Young Thomas May was given the education befitting the heir to these splendid properties. As a fellow-commoner of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, he distinguished himself in classical scholarship and unquestionably absorbed some of the Puritan doctrine then being disseminated in that place; later, as a student at Gray's Inn, although we may be sure he devoted more than his leisure to the theatre, as was the custom, he paid polite attention to the law, to the end that he might be a provident landed gentleman and a competent justice of the peace. But the course of his life was changed when he learned, upon the death of his father, that the family fortune had been dissipated and that what remained of the Mayfield property must needs be sold to discharge the debts of the deceased knight. Cast thus upon his own resources, this scholarly young man turned to literature as a means of gaining a livelihood.

Had May continued in the career for which he had been trained, there can be no doubt that the discoverable facts of his later life would be more numerous, for his name perforce would appear frequently in the local records, and it is conceivable that, like the celebrated Sir Humphrey May and other members of more prosperous branches of his family, he would have participated actively in national affairs. By adopting letters as a profession, however, May descended several steps in the social scale, and thereby suffered the fate common to most authors in

that age when authorship for profit was considered a scarcely reputable occupation—the fate, that is, of becoming a common man whose name appears only infrequently in official documents. The biographer of such a man must content himself with such scraps of information and hearsay as luck may drop into his hands; and in the case of May the number of such bits of information, particularly those pertaining to the period he devoted exclusively to play-writing, is comparatively small. Of these years in May's life even Aubrey, writing only a short time after May's death, knew little, and contented himself with setting down, in his charmingly incoherent fashion, only such bits of gossip as were palatable to his Royalist, scandal-loving taste. Of May's personal life during this period, we know merely that he was a bachelor, had lodgings in the purlieus of Westminster, and enjoyed a reputation for conviviality among the literary fraternity which under the leadership of Ben Jonson met nightly for wine and good talk at "the Sun, the Dog, the Triple Tun." It is pleasant, through May's acquaintance with them, to make these contacts with Jonson, Ford, Massinger, Shirley, and the rest; it is exasperating, however, that in this period May cannot be traced beyond his friendships. It is only after he had ceased to woo fame and fortune in the theatres, and had become a "poet" as distinguished from a "playwright," that May re-emerges from obscurity. Failing to please the London playgoers, he turned to other forms of writing, and by shrewdly dedicating his books to important personages endeavored to secure the favor of a wealthy and noble patron. To such an extent did he succeed in this endeavor that he gained some slight reputation—although no official position—at Court, and was permitted to dedicate three books to the King himself. It was this manifestation of royal favor that led May to hope for the laureateship; and there can be no doubt that he experienced disappointment when the post was given to the more able and more courtly Davenant. Later, when political feeling in England was strained to the point of an open rupture between King and Parliament, May, with what appears on the surface to be a contradiction in behavior, associated himself with the latter, and thus became one of the few important persons formerly

connected with the theatres who joined the party which for so long had set its face sternly against theatrical productions. It is unfair, however, to attribute exclusively to chagrin May's espousal of the Parliamentary cause. As this study will endeavor to show, his slight connection with courtly circles was evidently the result of financial necessity; as opposed to it, there was much in his training and habit of mind which might well have led him to "desert" the King. As a matter of fact, there is no good reason to doubt that honest political opinion was in large part responsible for his decision. Be that as it may, he served the Parliament well, as a publicist, however, and not as a politician; and his talents were rewarded with an official appointment and a good salary. At his death in 1650, he was honored with a solemn funeral and burial in Westminster Abbey. It is clear, from all these facts, that May was in his day a personage of importance in the world of letters, but that, even with respect to his work for the Parliament, his importance was confined to that sphere and did not extend to participation in what is usually called "affairs".

By none of these facts, however, is May's personality revealed. For our knowledge of what manner of man he was we are dependent upon gossip and whatever conclusions may be drawn from his work. We are told, on good authority, that he suffered all his life from an annoying impediment in his speech, and it is not unlikely that he was therefore of a somewhat shy and retiring disposition. On the other hand, he was fond of convivial companionship, and in the circle of his friends he enjoyed a modest reputation as a wit and a teller of "tall" stories. We may set down as slanderous gossip, however, Aubrey's assertion that May's conversation was profane or atheistic; for his plays, written in an age given much more than ours to violent speech, are singularly free from language which might offend even the most pious or the most chaste in our own day. From his writing it is obvious also that he was at basis a scholar, fond of learning for its own sake, and of the habit of mind which derives at least as much satisfaction from the contemplation of the past as from the observation of the present. It is clear also that he had a mind distinguished not so much by nimbleness or bril-

liance of thought as by a certain literalness coupled with soundness of judgment and sincerity of purpose. Beyond this, perhaps, it is impossible to generalize.

May's poetical writings fall into three classes—plays, translations, and narrative poems. As a dramatist May is best described as a "son" of Ben Jonson, although his plays reveal other influences almost as strong as that of Shakespeare's greatest contemporary. May's comedies, *The Old Couple* and *The Heir*, are interesting for the noticeable way in which they combine the most important tendencies in the drama of the period. His Roman tragedies, *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina*, were written in obvious imitation of the Jonsonian method, but display also more than a little of the influence of Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Antigone*, May's last play, in a sense partakes of the nature of a dramatic experiment, for in writing it the author went for his principal source directly to Greek drama, a mine which had been worked only slightly, if at all, by the writers of the heyday of Elizabethan drama. It is May's scholarship which relates him most definitely to the "tribe of Ben;" and it was his scholarship which led him to translate the *Pharsalia* of Lucan, the *Georgics* of Vergil, and a large number of the Epigrams of Martial, as well as the *Icon Animorum* of John Barclay. In this writing, likewise, he followed the teachings of Jonson; his translations are remarkable, not only for the way in which they combine fidelity to the original with an excellent English style, but also for the success with which they preserve the poetic merit of their originals. Of equal worth are his three narrative poems. The *Continuation* of the *Pharsalia*, in both English and Latin, is noteworthy for the virtuosity with which, in the Latin, it imitates the style and spirit of Lucan, and for the narrative skill which is revealed in both versions. In his poems on English history, *The Reigne of King Henry the Second* and *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third*, May reverted to a poetic mode which in his day was no longer fashionable; but his poems are quite worthy to stand beside those of Drayton, Daniel, and others who in this vein, a generation earlier, had given expression to a conscious national pride awakened by the splendid achievements of the last and greatest of the Tudors. In all of

these writings, May is revealed as a poet of more than average ability. He cannot, of course, be deemed worthy to stand beside the greatest of his age; but he occupies an honorable place among the many minor writers who helped to give infinite variety to this great epoch in English literature.

I

A Disappointed Heir

In the life of Thomas May there was one important episode and one important decision. Since the decision involved a political reversal, the episode which preceded it was distorted by May's enemies in his lifetime and has been exaggerated beyond its true importance by modern writers. May's offense lay in the fact that, originally a protegé of Charles the First, he espoused the Parliamentary cause after 1640 and became the official historian of Parliament. For this apparent defection he was never forgiven by his former friends who remained loyal to the King; they attacked him savagely in their writings and after the Restoration they dishonored his remains. And they had to their hands an episode to which they attributed May's disloyalty—an episode which, if it had been the only influence in forming his decision, must place him in a light far from complimentary. For by the time of Ben Jonson's death in 1637, May's literary reputation was so great that he had some hope of succeeding to the vacant laureateship. Not unnaturally, therefore, he was disappointed when the bays went to Davenant, a more logical candidate and—let the truth be told—a better poet. Because of this disappointment, said his enemies, May became one of the Parliamentarians. But in 1640 there were many reasons why a man might forsake the King—not the least of them the very natural feeling, born of the bitter experience of two reigns, that the Stuart family was unfit to rule without a check, in the form of a representative parliament, being placed upon them. And in the case of Thomas May there were also education and family history to influence him.

The May family had been settled in Eastern Sussex at latest since the closing years of the 13th century, when the name first makes its appearance in the local records. Various Mays and LeMays—the name is of Norman origin and derives ultimately from the Biblical Matthew—appear in the subsidy rolls as taxpayers; and the sums are sufficiently large to indicate that even

at this early date the family was one of considerable substance.[1] Although the exact relationships between these early members of the family and that branch to which the poet belonged are not clear, there can be little doubt that some connection existed. The earliest member of the family to whom the ancestry of the poet can be traced directly is a Thomas May[2] who as early as 1488 began to lease lands in Lamberhurst and Wadhurst. An examination of the records indicates that this man, the great-great-grandfather of the poet, was a yeoman farmer of considerable business shrewdness; we discover him steadily adding to his possessions over a period of years and laying the foundations of what was to become, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, a considerable fortune.[3] When he died, some time in 1500,[4] he left as his son and heir another Thomas, who in turn did his share towards improving the position of his family. Before his father's death this Thomas had married Margaret, daughter of Robert Whitfield.[5] For a number of years he farmed the great or rectorial tithes of Wadhurst,[6] and then, prosperous and ambitious, he took the step which was ultimately to make of the Mays a

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[1] In 1296 a William LeMay, of the village of Brembeltye, appears on the subsidy roll as paying a tax of £2.6s, and another of the same name is mentioned as of the towns of Lyndefeld and Burle. In the rolls of 1327 and 1333 there are mentioned several William Mays, or LeMays, as belonging to various parishes and paying taxes ranging from 6d. to £5.5s. *Sussex Record Society*, X, London, 1909; 35, 52, 128, 202, 313. (The publications of this society will be referred to hereafter by the abbreviation *S.R.S.*)

[2] Older geneologies (notably Harleian MS. 6164, f. 41; and D. G. C. Elwes and C. J. Robinson, *Castles, Mansions, and Manors of Western Sussex*, London, 1876: 137) mention a John May and a Richard who were in Wadhurst respectively one and two generations earlier, but of whom I find no mention in any public records.

[3] In 1488, this Thomas acquired the lease of a messuage, a hundred acres of land, ten acres of mead, and ten acres of marsh, all within the parish of Wadhurst. (*S.R.S.*, XXIII, London, 1916; 286.) Sometime later he leased a toft and thirty acres of land (*ibid.*, 290); and he was one of the querants in fines levied Easter Term, 1493, and Easter Term, 1494, concerning lands in Wadhurst and on the extreme western boundaries of Kent. (*Sussex Archeological Collections*, LVI, London, 1912; 129. [This series will be referred to hereafter as *S.A.C.*]). Still later, in 1496, he leased another messuage, a hundred acres of land, and ten acres of mead in Wadhurst and Ticehurst. (*S.R.S.*, XXIII, 293.)

[4] His will is included in a list of those probated before the Commissary of anterbury between Oct., 1500, and June, 1501. *Historical Manuscript Comssion*, 8th report; 333.

[5] *S.A.C.*, XIX, Lewes, 1867; 85.

county family. This venture was nothing less than the acquisition, in 1537–38, through the convenient legal fiction of quitclaim, of the manors of Bromeham (in Heathfield) and Blackford.[7] Five years later, together with his son Thomas, he acquired title to the manor of Pasheleygh (Pashley) and sundry tenements in "Pascheleygh, Tysehurst, Echyngham, and Burghherst."[8] It was, perhaps, the local esteem attaching to the ownership of these properties which led to his being described, in a Post-Mortem Inquisition, as "gentleman."

When this Thomas May died in 1553,[9] he was survived by three sons, all of whom were to found families members of which were to achieve some distinction. The eldest son, the Thomas already mentioned, inherited the manor at Ticehurst, which was, according to Sussex antiquaries, a great house, and destined to remain in the family until 1749, when it passed into other hands. Of this branch of the family the most distinguished members were Anthony May, who was High Sheriff of Surrey and Sussex in 1629, and his son Adrian, who served with distinction in the Cavalier forces during the Civil Wars. The youngest son of Thomas May was William, who, apparently having no expectation of inheriting any portion of his father's estate, had emigrated to Portugal, there married, and had issue Richard May. This Richard returned to London, was naturalized as an English subject, and became a member of the Company of Merchant Taylors, of which he was Warden 1575–6, 1578–80, and Master 1583–4.[10] He apparently prospered in trade, for he acquired considerable property in London, and contributed £300 toward the new building of Blackwell Hall.[11] In 1581, he acquired the important manor of Rawmere, in Western Sussex,[12] which remained in the possession of his

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[6] *S.A.C.*, XXVI, 1875; 90.
[7] *S.R.S.*, XIX, London, 1914; 69.
[8] *S.R.S.*, XX, London, 1915; 338.
[9] *Public Record Office, Lists and Indexes*, Vol. 23, London, 1907. (Index of Inquisitions, I. Henry VIII—Philip & Mary), 319. Also *S.R.S.*, XIV, London, 1912 (Post Mortem Inquisitions, 1485–1649), 152.
[10] Robinson and Elwes, *op. cit.*, 137.
[11] Stow, *Survey of London* (ed. W. J. Thoms, London, 1842; 44.) Blackwell Hall was a market place for the sale of woolen goods.
[12] *S.R.S.*, XX, 306–7.

descendants until it was sold in the middle of the 18th century by a Sir Thomas May, the last survivor of this branch of the family.[13] Of the Rawmere Mays the most distinguished was the Sir Humphrey May who was one of Charles I's most earnest apologists before the Parliament, and cousin to the poet; and his son Baptist May, Privy Purse to Charles II, and a celebrated wit and rake during the latter's reign.

The second son of the Thomas May of Wadhurst who died in 1553 was George May, grandfather of the poet, who, as younger son, was named in his father's will as heir to the latter's original manorial purchase, Pycards in Wadhurst.[14] But George May was not content with the paternal legacy and the unquestionably moderate income therefrom. Perhaps, like many enterprising men of the period, he realized that the quickest means to a substantial fortune was to be discovered in industry and trade; in any case, he is soon to be found mentioned in the records as an iron-founder. His choice of a business was no doubt determined by local conditions. Burwash, the village about which the estates of this family clustered, had long been famous for its iron-works; the furnaces there are frequently mentioned in the records, and it was there, according to Holinshed, that the first cannon ever seen in Europe was cast in 1543, by Ralph Hogge working in conjunction with the Frenchman Peter Boude.[15] Into this industry, then a thriving one, George May entered, and apparently achieved both success and fortune. In a bond dated at Greenwich, 4 March, 1574, he agreed, under penalty of £2000, not to found or sell iron ordnance without a license from the Queen;[16] and in 1588, in a letter dated 31 October, from the Lords of the Council to Lord Howard of Effingham, Lieutenant for the county of Surrey, concerning forges in the said shire, he is described as the proprietor of a "forge called Brodgell in Burrush parishe."[17] That he prospered in this business is clear, since he began as early as 1569 to acquire

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[13] Robinson and Elwes, *op. cit.*, 137.
[14] *S.R.S.*, XIV, London, 1912. (*Post Mortem Inquisitions*, 1485–1649); 152.
[15] M. A. Lower, *History of Sussex*, 2 v., Lewes, 1870; I. 93.
[16] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, I (1547–1580); 475.
[17] *Historical Manuscript Commission*, 7th report, 645.

additional property, the most important of which was the manor of Gyles, or St. Gyles, and various tenements in the parish of Burwash.[18] His prosperity is further attested by the fact that when in 1588, arming against the "great preparacons made by the King of Spaine both by sea and land—the same having been suche as the like was never prepared yet anie time against this realme," Queen Elizabeth required from her loving subjects extraordinary aid by way of loan, for the defense of the country, George May contributed, or rather was assessed, £50,[19] a sum large enough to indicate that he was one of the wealthier men of the county.

So far, as we have seen, the Mays, beginning as yeoman farmers, had prospered greatly, and had acquired substantial properties and, evidently, a reasonably large fortune. But it is also evident, from George May's connection with the iron industry, that this branch of the family had not yet acquired the social standing of a county family. It remained for George May's son, the father of the poet, to give it that position, with a knighthood in the bargain; and, in some way which does not appear, to dissipate the fortune which three of four generations had labored to acquire.

When George May died on September 15, 1593, he left as his son and heir Thomas May. When this young man inherited his father's considerable estate, he was aged "30 or more,"[20] and married to Barbara, probably the daughter of Edward Rich, of Hornden, Essex.[21] The Rich family, derived from the Richard Rich who was Sheriff of London in 1441, were people of some

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[18] *S. R. S.*, XIX (*Sussex Manors in the Feet of Fines*, I), London, 1914; 190.

[19] *S.A.C.*, I, London, 1848; 33, 36. Of the 108 names in the list for this division of Sussex, only 18 contributed more than this sum; most of them gave considerably less.

[20] *S.R.S.*, XIV, 152.

[21] Firth, in the *D. N. B.*, following the older genealogies of the May family, was unaware of the Christian name of May's mother, and mentions her simply as "———, the daughter of ——— Rich, of Horndon on the Hill, Essex." That her name was Barbara is clear from certain legal documents and from the record of her death in the registers of Mayfield Church [see below, p. 20] If, as all the older genealogists agree, she was the daughter of a Rich of Horndon, there is no question that her father was the Edward Rich here mentioned, since it was he who at this period held the Rich properties in Horndon. The composite genealogy given in Robinson and Elwes (*op. cit.*, 137) is curiously in error when it mentions her as the daughter of "Richard Horndon of Sussex."

importance in county and national affairs. Sir Robert Rich, the brother of Edward, was a Master in Chancery; and Edward's son Nathaniel, the brother of Barbara, distinguished himself during the Civil War as a colonel of cavalry under Fairfax, and later had the honor of being a state prisoner in the Tower of London.[22] That this was a "good marriage" for the son of George May there can be no question, since it linked him with gentlefolk, and marked an important step upward toward the social level which he evidently desired to achieve. To this pair were born several children, among them, sometime in the year 1595, the son, christened Thomas after his father, who was to become the poet considerably celebrated and vituperated in the second quarter of the next century.

Neither the place nor the exact date of the birth of Thomas May the poet is certain. He was probably born at Burwash, in which parish was situated the principal manor which his father had inherited in 1593, although there is no record of his birth in the Burwash registers.[23] Concerning the date of his birth, the only evidence is to be drawn from the record of the Post-Mortem Inquisition into his father's affairs. In that document,[24] he is described as being "aged 20 years, 6 months and not more at the time of his father's death." The same document gives the date of the latter event as 23 August, 13 James, *i.e.*, 1616. If we accept the "20 years, 6 months and not more" as accurate (and there is no reason why we should not), we have clear proof

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[22] The career of Col. Rich is mentioned in Whitelock's *Memorials*, p. 359. Several later members of the family also achieved prominence: one of Nathaniel's sons was Receiver of the King's Taxes in 1694; another, Sir Robert Rich of Rosehall in Suffolk, became Lord of the Admiralty and M. P. for Dunwich; and the latter's son, also Sir Robert, who died in 1708, was Field Marshall and Colonel of the Fourth Dragoons, and, like his father, a member of Parliament. For this, and the information given above concerning Edward Rich, see Hasted, *History of Kent*, (ed. H. H. Drake), London, 1886; 182–3.

[23] I give the latter statement on the authority of Miss E. M. Bell-Irving, *Mayfield*, London, 1903. Most older writers (e. g., Baron Maseres in his preface to the 1812 edition of May's *History of Parliament*) give his birthplace as Mayfield, but this is palpably incorrect, since his father did not acquire Mayfield Manor until 1598 (see below, p. 19). Moreover, there is no record of his birth in the Mayfield parish registers, which are very full for this period.

[24] See below, p. 29.

that the poet was born some time late in 1595 or early in 1596.[25]

Thomas May the father, as has been said, appears from all the evidence to have been a man anxious to improve his position in the world. Three years after the birth of his son, he took the first step in this direction by purchasing the great manor and "palace" of Mayfield, in the parish of that name, a few miles from his old home at Burwash. Since it was in this place that Thomas May the poet spent his boyhood, and since it was as prospective lord of this manor that he was educated, first at Cambridge and later at the Inns of Court, it will perhaps be not irrelevant to a study of his career to pause for a glimpse of the estate which was the high-water mark of the social progress of the May family.

The traditions of Mayfield, which Coventry Patmore called "the sweetest village in England," go back at the latest to the time of St. Dunstan. It was here, while working at his forge, that Dunstan, according to tradition, was tempted by the devil in the guise of a beautiful young woman. But finally observing the cloven hoof, the saint heated his tongs and with them seized the fiend by the nose. Shrieking with pain, the devil resumed his proper shape, and fled to cool his nose, first in Mayfield Iron-Spring, next at Tunbridge Wells, a few miles distant; to this Satanic immersion may be attributed the fact that both springs still have mineral properties of high medicinal value. To commemorate his triumph, Dunstan built a wooden church at Mayfield, and in this church, and its numerous successors on the same site, have been preserved until quite recently the tongs, hammer, anvil and mortar which, according to the legend of the place, Dunstan was using at the time of his temptation. To turn from legend to fact, it is certain that sometime in the tenth century, Dunstan, then Archbishop of Canterbury, built at Mayfield an archepiscopal palace for use during his frequent journeys into Sussex. The Palace, as the building continued to be called even after the Dissolution, was used as a summer residence by Dunstan's successors in the primacy, who added to it

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[25] Probably before March so that in any case the date would be 1595, Old Style.

from time to time, so that it became a structure of considerable size and varied architecture. By the end of the 13th century it was a building fit for the entertainment of royalty; for it is a matter of record that three times (1297, 1299 and 1303) during the primacy of Robert de Winchelsea the Palace was visited by Edward I and a large company of retainers. About 1350, Simon de Islip, who had become Archbishop in 1348, caused to be erected a second building, called the Hall, which was likewise used as a summer residence by subsequent primates.

After the work of suppressing the monasteries was well under way, these valuable possessions of the Archbishops came, quite naturally, to the attention of Cromwell; and the Palace and the Hall were alienated to the Crown, 12 November, 1545. Cranmer, surrendering the estate, described it as "the manor of Mayfield, in the Bailywick and Bedelry of South Malling, and all my part of Mayfield, &c, the rectories of Mayfield and Wadhurst, &c, and churches, patronages . . ." In the following year, the manor of Mayfield was returned as consisting of 200 acres of demesne, 4000 acres of land, 2200 of pasture, 1000 of mead, 2000 of heath—a considerable property indeed. In that same year, 1546, the estate was granted to Sir Edward North, Chancellor of the Augmentation Office and a Privy Councillor, who was later to be raised to the peerage and to become one of the sixteen guardians appointed during the minority of Edward VI.[26] North held the estate but a few months: in August, 1546, it was sold to Sir John Gresham, who in 1567 sold it to his kinsman, Sir Thomas Gresham, the celebrated banker and founder of the royal exchange. The marks of the latter's ownership survived in the Palace for many years, in the form of repairs and additions, in the Gresham arms over the great fireplace, and in a special staircase said to have been built for the use of Queen Elizabeth, on the occasion of a royal progress to Mayfield, in order that her feet might not be forced to tread the common stairs. After Gresham's death in 1579, the estate came by

[26] At the same time, he was given lands at Charterhouse in London. Here he was visited for four days by Queen Elizabeth; the entertainment proved so costly that he was forced to spend the rest of his days in retirement at Peterhouse, Cambridge.

devise into the possession of Sir Henry Neville. The latter began to alienate the property gradually; and on 6 May, 1597, he sold the mansion, manor, and lands to Thomas May of Burwash, the father of the poet.[27] The record of the transfer of the Mayfield property to the Mays is preserved in the Feet of Fines;[28] and the purchase price is elsewhere[29] given as £6387.

It was, then, to this estate that Thomas May was brought as a child of two; it was here that he spent his early years. Such a home, a magnificent old manor with extensive parks and grounds, in the loveliest part of the Sussex Weald, could not fail to make its impression upon the mind of a young boy: in addition to the general atmosphere of wealth, there were the traditions of the place going back to earliest times, and the more recent traditions of the progresses of Elizabeth and her courtiers.[30] There can be no doubt that in his earliest youth May was

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[27] The foregoing account of Mayfield Palace has been derived from the following sources: Eadmer, *Life of St. Dunstan; Journal of the British Archeological Association*, XXIII, London, 1867, article on Mayfield by Edw. Roberts; *S.A.C.*, II, London, 1849; 233–4 (article by H. R. Hoare, on the architecture of Mayfield); *ibid.*, XXI, London, 1869; 1–9 (article on Mayfield by Wm. Durrant Cooper); E. M. Bell-Irving, *Mayfield*, London, 1903 (an account of the village as well as of the manor); *S.R.S.*, XX; 295.

The later history of Mayfield is not without interest. In 1617 the Mays sold to the Bakers (see below, p. 29), who lost their fortune in the Wars. Thereafter the buildings fell into neglect; stones were carried away, and by 1740 the destruction of the Hall was complete. The ruins of the Palace were purchased in 1858 by Francis Cordrey, who sold in 1863 to the Duchess of Leeds. The latter restored the building and gave it to its present owners. It has been, for many years, a Roman Catholic convent, and, as such, is of course closed to visitors.

[28] The record reads as follows: "Thomas May of Burwash, esq., plaintiff, and Henry Nevyll, esq., and Anne his wife, deforciants: . . . all that the Manor of Mayfield and all houses, etc., and all the glass and wainscott of the chief Manor House or mansion of the said manor. All that late disparked Park and impaled ground commonly called Mayfield park in Mayfield aforesaid, and all and every of the messuages and all that the Rectory of Mayfield aforesaid, with all the glebe lands, tythes, oblations, etc., together with the advowson right of patronage, donation and free disposition of the Vicarage of Mayfield aforesaid, and all that the manor of Battersden, also [*i. e.*, alias] Penny Bridge except . . . [there follow numerous exceptions according to former sales] . . . then the said Henry Nevyll grants to the said Thomas May his heirs and assigns forever." *S.R.S.*, XX, 295; and Bell-Irving, *op. cit.*, 160.

[29] Burrell MSS. See *S.A.C.*, II, 245.

[30] A large room in the Palace was for generations known as "Queen Elizabeth's room." See Nichols, *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 v., London, 1823; I, 333.

accustomed to an environment of wealth and securely established social position.

Little is known of Thomas May's boyhood. In all his writing he refers to it neither directly nor by allusion that might be interpreted autobiographically. Hence any account of his earliest years must be inferred from only the most meagre evidence. In 1602, May's life was saddened by the death of his mother. This event is recorded tersely in the registers of Mayfield Parish: "Buried, 11 January. Barbara May, wife of Mr. May." She had borne one other son at least; for in the same register there are the records of the baptism, on 8 April, 1598, of "George May, son of Mr. Thomas May," and of the burial of the same child in October 1602. Thomas May the elder did not long remain a widower. A few months after his first wife's death,[31] he married again—this time Jane, or Joan, the daughter of Sir Michael Sandys, of Throwley, in Kent.[32] The latter bore him several daughters—Martha, Ann, Susanna, and Judith.[33] It is not difficult to picture young Thomas being reared by a stepmother, along with a group of half sisters, to whom, as their elder by at least nine years, he must have seemed a lordly young gentleman indeed. After his very early training at the hands of his mother and stepmother, it is possible that he received his first education in whatever local schools may have been in existence at the time, or, what is even more probable, (as befitted a young gentleman to the manor born) at the hands of the local vicar, whose patron was the boy's father.

Meanwhile, the elder Thomas May proceeded to newer honors. In 1603 he was knighted at Greenwich and became Sir Thomas.[34] The reasons for this minor distinction are not clear; but there is evidence to suggest that he had come to the favorable attention

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[31] The date of this second marriage is uncertain, since no record of it is to be found in the Mayfield registers; but since a daughter of this union was baptized in July, 1604, the wedding could not have taken place much later than the summer of 1603.

[32] *Biographia Britannica*, 3064, which gives as reference a pedigree of the Mays in a Visitation of Sussex, fol. MS. temp. Car. I.

[33] The baptisms of these, as well as the death of Ann, are recorded in the Mayfield registers.

[34] Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, 4 v., London, 1795–1811; III, 156, note.

of the new king and was perhaps one of the throng of suppliant courtiers who came not only from Scotland but also from the Home Counties to besiege Whitehall, many of whom received the knighthoods which Elizabeth had bestowed sparingly but which James lavished so frequently that the honor became meaningless. Whatever his connection with the court may have been originally, it is clear that he served the king, probably in some trifling and unimportant way, almost to the time of his death in 1617. The evidence of that connection, although it belongs to a later date, may be given here as well as not. In 1615, after the marriage of Somerset to Frances Howard, when the Winwood-Coke-Bacon faction was machinating for the overthrow of the favorite by reviving the Overbury scandal, and Somerset, as usual, was dealing with both his enemies and the king in high-handed fashion, James wrote numerous letters to Somerset, at once rebuking him for his hauteur and at the same time making denial that Villiers was supplanting the Duke in the royal affection. One of these letters is preserved among the Lambeth MSS., and is thus docketed:

> Adrian Moore, Jhone Holland. These three letters weare in the black boxe signed with that w^{ch} Sir Thomas Maye brought.[35]

That this Sir Thomas May was the father of the poet is certain, since there was no other Sir Thomas at this time in any of the branches of the family. His connection with the king is, of course, not clear; he may have acted merely as messenger. On the other hand, he may have been much closer to the King; for in that same letter James, having protested his loyalty to Somerset, and commenting on the common gossip that he was deserting his former favorite, writes that he had "delivered [his] mynde as fullie to Maye as ye could have wished." This may allude to the Sir Thomas who carried the letter; on the other hand, it may refer to Sir Humphrey May, the cousin of Sir Thomas, whom the king later sent to Somerset to urge him to confess to complicity in the Overbury murder, and who subsequently was

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[35] *Archeologia*, XLI, London, 1867; 81–85.

to have a long and honorable career as a jurist under Charles I.[36] But whatever the exact connection, it is evident that Sir Thomas May was already at court in 1603, in which year he was knighted at Greenwich, and that he was still there, perhaps fairly close to the King, in 1615, when the great schemes for the humiliation of Somerset were being brought to a successful conclusion.

It was only natural, then, that Sir Thomas should give his son and heir an education of the sort at that time in vogue for young gentlemen who one day might expect to fall heir to the ownership and management of great estates. Such training included, as a rule, several years at one of the universities, an apprenticeship to the law at one of the Inns of Court, and perhaps a journey to the Continent—an expedition which in the 17th century meant the grand tour through France and Italy. The first two elements of this education Thomas May received; the third, as we shall see, he was probably denied through force of circumstances.

On 7 September, 1609, May was admitted fellow-commoner of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.[37] At the time, he was fourteen years old—an age at which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, it was not at all uncommon for boys to matriculate at the universities. In the light of May's later career, both the college of which he became a member and the rank which he held assume some importance. Sidney Sussex was at that time a new college, having been founded but a few years before with funds given by Lady Frances Sidney, the wife of the powerful Earl of Sussex, and aunt to both Leicester and Sir Philip Sidney; like Emmanuel, it had been born at the meeting-point of two great epochs, in the period when the flowers of the Renaissance were just beginning to feel the chilling touch of Puritanism. From its earliest foundation, therefore, Sidney Sussex had been Puritan in tone; indeed, in the original statutes it was stipulated that the master should be one who "Papismum, Haereses, superstitiones, et errores omnes ex anima abhorret et detestatur."[38]

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[36] See *D. N. B.*, article on Humphrey May.

[37] *The Book of Matriculations and Degrees in the University of Cambridge* (compiled by J. Venn and J. R. Venn), Cambridge, 1913; 455.

[38] C. E. Stubbs, *Cambridge and Its Story*, London, 1903; 267–284.

And as late as 1628, Archbisop Laud denounced Sidney Sussex College as a nursery of Puritanism and sedition.[39] Consequently, although there were among its alumni a few men who in later times became Royalists—notably Sir Robert Lestrange, Edward Montagu and the Catholic Wat Montagu—by far the majority of Sidney Sussex men became supporters of the Puritan cause. A mere list of names of the men who were up in May's time, or a little later, is enough to suggest the quality of the place and its teaching. One of the first fellows was Will Bradshaw, a learned Puritan divine, who wrote "A Discourse of the Unreasonableness of Separation" and a pamphlet on "The Sin Against the Holy Ghost;" and among the graduates were Daniel Dyke, author of a tract on "The Deceitfulness of Man's Heart," and his brother Jeremy Dyke; Jeremy Whitaker, the learned rector of Stratton in Rutlandshire and a staunch Puritan; Thomas Adams and Paul Michlethwayte, both of whom achieved fame as preachers in London; John Bramhall, who was admitted with May in 1609, and who subsequently, as Bishop of Derry and later as Archbishop of Armagh, wrote much against the Papists; as well as a host of lesser Puritan divines whose names are all but forgotten.[40] Finally, it must not be forgotten that no less a person than Oliver Cromwell was a Sidney Sussex man, having entered as fellow commoner in 1616; that he remembered favorably the Puritan tradition of the place is clear from the fact that during the Civil Wars, when he seized and melted down the valuable plate of the other Cambridge colleges, he left the Sidney Sussex plate untouched and therefore is included in the official list of benefactors of the College.

It was, then, at one of the primary fountainheads of academic Puritanism that May drank in his undergraduate days. That the Puritanism of the place may have entered into his thinking and much later have been one of the influences which led him to decide for Parliament and against the King seems to me a hypothesis which, although impossible of proof, is sufficiently

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[39] See *D.N.B.*, article on Cromwell.

[40] These names are given in Dyer, *History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge*, 2 v., London, 1814; II, 427–8.

probable as not to admit of much debate. But May absorbed more than Puritanism at Cambridge. He "seriously applied himself to his studies," according to Fuller,[41] and became a first-rate classical scholar, a fact which is evident in every line of his later writings. That he read all the Latin poets and historians—Vergil, Horace, Martial, Juvenal, Lucan, Statius, to mention only a few of those whose work he either translated or borrowed from directly—and the principal Greek writers as well, is in no way unusual or surprising, since it is commonplace knowledge that in those days education meant education in the classics. What is important is the fact that with Thomas May these same classics remained one of the absorbing interests of his life, and that he not only devoted much of his time to translating some of them, but also came under their influence in his English plays and non-dramatic poems to such an extent that he must be characterized as a "classical" writer. But there is still another way in which the classics may have influenced him. "When Milton was an undergraduate . . . ," says a modern historian,[42] "familiarity with the great pagan names and stories suggested to young patriots, as Royalist writers observed with regret, the civic ideals of the ancient Republics." To say that this was the case with May, and that his classical studies gave him a certain sympathy with republican ideals, is not mere theorizing; we have the testimony of one of his contemporaries that this was the case. Aubrey, who furnished many of the notes upon which Anthony à Wood based his celebrated *Athenae*, said of May in one note that May's "translation of Lucan's excellent poeme made him in love with the republique, which tang stuck by him." In a later note he reiterates the point: "That of Lucan is true, *scil.*, that it made him incline to a republic."[43] The translation of the *Pharsalia* came a decade after his residence at Cambridge, but there can be no question that at Cambridge May read Lucan, who, whatever his qualities

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[41] *History of the Worthies of England* (ed. Nuttall, 3 v., London, 1840), III, 258.

[42] G. M. Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts*, 9th ed., New York and London, 1920; 18.

[43] Aubrey's *Brief Lives* (ed. Andrew Clark), 2 v., Oxford, 1898; II, 55–6.

as a poet, was certainly an ardent patriot, and other Latin writers whose political idealism might lead a thoughtful young Englishman to regard with some distrust the absolutism of the Stuarts.

But if May absorbed both Puritanism and classicism at Cambridge, it must not be assumed that he lived there a life which might have led him to become either a parson or a schoolmaster, the common lot of impecunious students who read widely in theology or the classics. He was a gentleman's son and as such he had been admitted as fellow-commoner. The fellow-commoners, then as at a much later date, were the sons of the nobility and gentlemen of fortune, and were given their title by reason of their association at table and ceremonies with the Fellows of the College. Although we have no record of May's life at Cambridge (he does not allude to his undergraduate days at any place in his writings), we need not extend imagination beyond its legitimate bounds to assume that in his years at the University, May led the life of a young gentleman of wealth and social position, associating with youths of similar rank in the games and recreations of college life, devoting a large portion of his time to his classical reading, as became a young man of a naturally studious turn of mind, and yet having all the while an eye to his future career, which would take him back to Mayfield as a country gentleman, and perhaps to Court and honors such as his father, Sir Thomas, was even then trying to achieve.

For a little more than three years Thomas May continued as a student at Cambridge. Then, early in 1613 (1612, Old Style), when he was about eighteen years old, he proceeded Bachelor of Arts and was graduated.[44] What he did during the ensuing year is not known; whether he returned to Mayfield, or traveled, or went immediately up to London, it is idle to speculate, since neither he nor his contemporaries who are the chief sources of information concerning his life have anything to say on the subject. But in 1615, on the 6th of August,

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[44] *The Book of Matriculations and Degrees . . . in the University of Cambridge, op. cit.*, 455.

a little more than a year after his graduation from Cambridge, May was admitted to Gray's Inn,[45] and took up the life of a student at the Inns of Court. A period of residence at the Inns was the common procedure for a gentleman's son, both that he might learn enough of the law to fit him for his future duties as a justice of the peâce and also that he might gain experience of London and its life in the good society of his peers. That these were the reasons for May's residence at Gray's Inn is clear both from his social status at the time and from the fact, according to Clarendon,[46] that he suffered from an "imperfection" in his speech—probably stammering—which would have precluded the fulfilment of any hope he might have entertained of practicing as a barrister.

There is no evidence to show whether or not May applied himself seriously to his legal studies during his residence at the Inns of Court. One suspects, for a number of reasons, that he did not. In the first place, in his writings he never uses the jargon of the law, a weakness to which lawyers are notoriously prone; instead, his allusions are entirely classical in their nature, and it i perhaps not unfair to assume that May devoted the time which should have been spent in the perusal of his law-books to the reading of the Roman writers whom he esteemed so highly. For another reason, we know that he later turned to the writing of plays, and it is likely that his interest in the drama was due to the fact that, in the company of his fellow students, he spent many hours that should have been more seriously occupied in frequent attendance at the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan—in short, that more of his waking hours were spent in the playhouses on the Bankside than in his rooms off Holborn. How large a part the theatre played in the lives of the young gentlemen of the Inns of Court at this time is amply attested by contemporary writers; perhaps the most severe indictment of the law-students in this respect is that of Bishop Earle in his *Microcosmography*:

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[45] Foster, *Register of Admissions to Gray's Inn*, London, 1899; 137.
[46] *Life*, ed., 3 v., Oxford, 1827; I, 39–40.

> That the inns of court men were undone but for the players; that they are their chiefest guests and employment, and the sole business that makes them afternoon's men: that this is one of the first things they learn, as soon as they are admitted; to see stage-plays and take smoke at a playhouse, which they commonly make their study.[47]

In the light of his later activities, it is safe to suggest, I think, that May must have come within the scope of this arraignment, and that whatever Puritanism he may have acquired at Cambridge did not extend to the Roundhead condemnation of the theatre.

But there is more direct evidence than this that during his early days in London May's pursuits were not entirely legal and literary. After his death, his enemies resurrected—or invented—a number of scandalous stories about him. One of these concerns the immorality of his early life in London. Anthony à Wood says that as a young man May was "debauched *ad omnia*,"[48] and later writers[49] have followed this assertion with painstaking fidelity. But here, as in so many other instances, Wood must be checked. Wood's chief informant concerning May was Aubrey, and concerning this phase of the poet's life Aubrey has the following to say:

> As to Tom May, Mr. Edmund Wyld told me that he was acquainted with him when he was young, and then he was as other young men of this towne are, *scil.* he was *debaucht ad omnia*: but doe not by any meanes take notice of it—for we have all been young.[50]

It will be seen that Wood, an ardent Royalist and therefore less candid than Aubrey, took merely a single phrase—and that the most striking—from his correspondent's statement, and, omitting the qualifications, gave the phrase importance through isolation. Certainly Aubrey's statement means, not that May was a wastrel and a debauchée, but merely that as a young man he was guilty of the follies of youth. But on the other hand,

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[47] Quoted by Trevelyan, *op. cit.*
[48] *Athenae Oxoniensis*, 5 v., London, 1813; III, 810.
[49] Down to and including Professor Firth in his article in the *D.N.B.*
[50] *Op. cit.*, II, 56.

if Aubrey's assertion refers to the period when May was at Gray's Inn and the subsequent youthful years in London, it also means that May the law-student was not an eager seeker after legal knowledge, but that, like his fellows, he led the life of a young man about town and that, like Master Justice Shallow before him, he had heard the chimes at midnight.

But May was not to be permitted to continue long a student at Gray's Inn nor to return to Mayfield as lord of the manor and country gentleman. In July 1616, less than a year after his son's admission to Gray's Inn, Sir Thomas died and was buried in the churchyard at Mayfield;[51] the settlement of his affairs revealed the fact that he had dissipated the property and that his son and heir would have no land to manage and no position to maintain. That Sir Thomas, the heir to a considerable fortune and a man ambitious for worldly success, as appears from his connection with the Court and the education which he gave his son, was an improvident husbandman is plainly revealed from an examination of his affairs from the time he came into his property until his death. It will be remembered that he had purchased the properties in Mayfield in 1598; two years later he sold the manor of St. Giles in Burwash,[52] which he had inherited from his father: we may surmise that he was already living beyond his income, and that money was needed to maintain the Mayfield estate and perhaps to promote those ends which led to the knighthood in 1603. But the liquidation of the Burwash properties was not sufficient, and by 1604 Sir Thomas had begun the first of a series of alienations of the Mayfield lands. In that year certain tenements in Mayfield and a portion of the tithes belonging to the rectory of Mayfield, as well as the remnants of the Burwash property, went by quitclaim to John Polhill;[53] and in 1605 another parcel of land was sold to John

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[51] The entry in the parish register reads: "24 July 1616, Sir Thomas May knight buried." Miss E. M. Bell-Irving (*op. cit.*, 96) is apparently in error in her statement that there was a public funeral at Westminster Abbey. There is no record of such a ceremony in the Abbey registers; probably she was confusing Sir Thomas with his more distinguished son.

[52] *S. R. S.*, XIX; 190–191.

[53] *S. R. S.*, XX; 296.

Porter, and with it went the gift of the living of Mayfield Church.[54] In 1609 the remaining tithes belonging to Mayfield rectory were quitclaimed to George Snelling, Kt.,[55] and in 1612 were sold other properties in Echingham, Salehurst, and Ticehurst, which had likewise been inherited from George May his father.[56] The complete collapse of Sir Thomas's estate is revealed in the Post Mortem Inquisition; the record shows that the manors of Mayfield and Pennybridge had been mortgaged in 1608 to William and Abraham Maynard, and later to Richard May, a kinsman, for £600. In 1615, upon Sir Thomas's failure to pay, Richard had possessed certain of the lands. In addition, over a long period of years, Sir Thomas had been forced to dispose of large parcels of land, and, in 1615, to rent out the Park of Mayfield itself.[57]

To this estate, Thomas May, Esq., late of Cambridge and Gray's Inn, "aged twenty years, six months and not more" at the time of his father's death, was heir. Plainly, with the valuable lands and rents disposed of by the deceased knight, the remaining property, consisting only of Mayfield Manor and a few tenements, was a white elephant on the hands of the young legatee. Accordingly, in November 1616, Thomas May, acting in conjunction with his stepmother, Dame Joan, and a Richard May (apparently the Richard who in 1615 had foreclosed on certain of the Mayfield lands), sold Mayfield to John Baker, gent., according to an indenture enrolled in Chancery, and the transaction was legally concluded in the Feet of Fines in 1619.[58] What proportion of the purchase price came to May does not appear. Since Clarendon tells us that "he had only an annuity left him, not proportionate to a liberal education,"[59] it would seem that his share was comparatively small. Perhaps most

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[54] *S. A. C.*, XXI; 18. In 1605, the living fell vacant and was given to Robert Whitfield by the Porter mentioned above. A tablet in Mayfield Church, giving a list of the incumbents and their patrons, incorrectly names Sir Thomas May as Whitfield's patron.

[55] *S.R.S.*, XX; 296.

[56] *Ibid.*, XIX; 202.

[57] *Ibid.*, XIV; 153.

[58] *S. A. C.*, XXVI, 63; and *S. R. S.*, XX; 295. Professor Firth, in the *D.N.B.*, is in error when he states that Mayfield was sold by Sir Thomas May.

[59] *Life*, I, 39.

of it went to pay Sir Thomas's debts and to settle finally with the Richard May who was one of the parties to the sale.

Thus ended the pretensions of this branch of the May family to the condition of gentry. With only a small annuity instead of the large estate he might have expected, Thomas May was faced with the necessity of shifting for himself. The law, although it was at this time offering splendid opportunities for shrewd young men, was closed to him, not only because of his incomplete training but also because of the impediment in his speech. He had a sound classical education, but neither the church nor the universities offered many opportunities for a young man who had no backing and who stammered in the bargain. Remembering, perhaps, the plays which had been his enthusiasm of the preceding year, and seeing in the business of writing for the theatre an opportunity for fortune if not for fame, this youth, whose "parts of art and nature were very good," according to Clarendon,[60] once more went up to London.

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[60] *Ibid.*.

II

A Man of Letters

When, some time after 1617, May returned to London, faced with the disagreeable necessity of depending upon his own mother-wit for advancement, he doubtless felt a certain natural resentment at the impoverishment which had cut him off from the possibility of a courtly career. Indeed, there may be an autobiographical significance in the lament of Clerimont, an impecunious young gentleman who through no dramatic necessity finds his way into the opening scenes of May's play *The Heir*, when he says to the more fortunate Philocles:

> Alas we must not fall in love, and choose whom we like best; we have no jointures for them, as you blessed heirs can have.[1]

Finding himself without "jointure," May had recourse to the business of letters—then as now a trade offering uncertain financial returns—as the work in which he was best qualified, by aptitude and training, to achieve both fame and profit.

As a matter of course, May's first literary ventures took him into the realm of drama, the most popular literary product of the age. Play-writing was beginning to pay surprisingly well; at this time even such a minor playwright as Robert Daborne was receiving as much as £18 for a single play and grumbling that the price was too low. Under such inspiration as this, May naturally turned to the theatres, and he forthwith wrote two comedies in rapid succession. Some critics, to be sure, have seen in the unprofessional tone of May's earliest play evidence that he never considered himself a professional playwright. That such a conclusion is unwarranted is clear from the fact that May is alluded to by a number of his contemporaries as belonging to the convivial fraternity of playwrights who flourished in the twenties.[2] Although it is true that he later

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[1] Act I, Scene ii.
[2] See below, p. 33-36.

became a "poet" and as such probably looked down upon his plays as the trifling fancies of his youth, there can be no doubt that in the decade after 1618 he was largely occupied with the business of writing for the stage. *The Heir*, a tragicomedy in the manner of Fletcher, was performed at the Bull, by the Company of the Revels, in 1620. It has been suggested, on eminent authority, that *The Old Couple*, an attempt at a comedy of humors written perhaps before *The Heir*, may have been acted by the same company at about the same time. There follow a few years of which we have no record of May's activities, literary or otherwise; it is possible that he engaged in anonymous hack-work, even that he was employed in the obscure dramatic collaboration which in that age was so common and which is so tantalizing in its refusal to yield up its secrets to even the most industrious scholarship. After this period, May emerges once more, this time as the author of two tragedies on Roman themes, *The Tragedy of Cleopatra Queene of Aegypt* and *Julia Agrippina, Empresse of Rome*, acted respectively in 1626 and 1628. About the same time, he must have written his *Tragedy of Antigone the Theban Princesse*.[3]

May's life during the years of his connection with the theatres is shrouded in the obscurity which usually attended the play-wrights of this period. Aubrey tells us, without reference to any particular time, that May "lodged in the little [court?] by Canon-rowe, as you go through the alley;"[4] and it well may be that May had rooms there during his play-writing days. Canon Row, or Stevens Alley (more properly St. Stephens Alley), lay in the neighborhood of King Street and Tothill Street; it derived its name, according to Stow,[5] "for that the same belonged to the dean and canons of St. Stephen's chapel, who were there lodged, as now divers noblemen and gentlemen." It was in May's day a street notorious for its taverns—Marvell, in his verses on "Tom

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[3] A discussion of these plays, with the dates of publication and the evidence for the dates of performance, will be found below, Chapters IV and V.

[4] *Brief Lives* (ed. A. Clark), II, 56.

[5] *Survey of London* (ed. Thoms, 1842), 168. The present Canon Row begins immediately opposite the Houses of Parliament and runs east for about a hundred yards, parallel with Whitehall and the Embankment and between the two. It is still notable for its public houses.

May's Death," mentions the Pope's Head and the Mitre—and his residence there lends some substantiation to Aubrey's assertion, previously mentioned, that May was a gentleman of convivial habits. If he was convivial, he was in no way different from the general run of his contemporaries. Moreover, May enjoyed a certain freedom to indulge his personal tastes in this matter, for although he was a handsome man, according to Aubrey,[6] he never married, and until his death remained untrammeled by the burdens of family life.

Certainly it is true that during the years of his play-writing May was one of the dramatists who met nightly for conversation and a friendly bottle at one of the London taverns for which the Mermaid serves as a universally familiar example. It cannot be repeated too frequently, however, in view of the tendency of modern dealers in *chroniques scandaleuses* to place wilful misconstruction upon the matter, that the Elizabethan taverns were not necessarily dens of drunkenness and vice, and that the frequenting of them by playwrights of the period is not a sign of habitual inebriation on the part of those worthies. Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, for example, were far too productive in their art to have been addicted to overindulgence in wine; and yet they met frequently, if not nightly, at the Mermaid. The tavern was to them and their friends what the coffee house was to Dr. Johnson and his cronies, and what the clubs in Pall Mall are to the modern Georgians. It was a place of good talk and, since the age knew nothing of restrictions in these matters, of conviviality; a friendly place where, to quote the fine lines of Master Francis Beaumont, one might hear words

> So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life.

The excellent Thomas Heywood, our "prose Shakespeare," has

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[6] *op. cit.*, II, 56.

described for us the informality existing among these playwrights thus met together, and since he mentions May it will perhaps be permitted me to quote here his well-known lines:

> Marlo, renown'd for his rare art and wit
> Could ne're attaine beyond the name of Kit;
> . . . . . .
> Excellent Bewmont, in the foremost ranke
> Of the rar'st Wit, was never more than Franck.
> Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose inchanting Quill
> Commanded Mirth or Passion, was but Will.
> And famous Johnson, though his learned Pen
> Be dipt in Castaly, is still but Ben.
> Fletcher and Webster, of that learned packe
> None of the mean'st, yet neither was but Jacke.
> Deckers but Tom; nor May, nor Middleton.
> And hee's now but Jacke Foord, that once were John.[7]

It is pleasant to realize that May was accepted by the "learned packe," and that he was accustomed to foregather with the immortals of the twenties in their festivals of wit.

The particular group with which May was intimate had as its rock and center sturdy Ben Jonson—an older Ben now, who, enthroned imperially upon his favorite chair in the Apollo Room of the Devil Tavern or at "the Sun, the Dog, the Triple Tun," discoursed of life and manners and art to his youthful admirers. Jonson's fondness for gathering young poets about him is well-known, and May must have fallen under the spell of his influence early, for the Jonsonian tone in May's early plays is so strong as to suggest a personal as well as a literary basis. It would be tempting, were this the fictionized biography at present in vogue, to paint a picture of Master Ben delivering himself in stately wise of his sonorous opinions, with no nimble-witted Shakespeare to harass him now, surrounded by his "sons," mad-cap Tom Randolph, Cartwright who "writes all like a man," the favorite Richard Brome, and the others to whom he gave suggestions and sometimes careful instruction in the dramatic

[7] "Hierarchie of Blessed Angels," 1635.

art. Among them would be Thomas May, speaking seldom because of the imperfection in his speech, "which was a great mortification to him, and kept him from entering upon any discourse but in the company of his very friends;"[8] but sometimes perhaps—for he had a reputation for a species of wit[9]—"discharging his occasional conversations in a quaint aphorism or a poor jest" like Charles Lamb, and thereby perhaps, again like Lamb, getting a reputation of "always aiming at wit . . . which is at least as good as aiming at dulness." Such a picture, no doubt, would be substantially true; and it is pleasant to think that the youthful May, fresh from the University and Gray's Inn, and wishing to establish a name for himself as a dramatist, was one of those who received lessons in making plays from the distinguished veteran of the theatres.

The friendship between May and Jonson endured until the latter's death. When May's complete translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* was offered to the world, Jonson wrote pleasantly commendatory verses addressed to "my chosen friend, the learned Translator of Lucan, Thomas May, Esquire," and signed "Your true friend in Judgment and Choise, Ben. Jonson."[10] And when, after his death, Jonson's friends put together the well-known memorial volume, *Jonsonus Virbius*, May returned the compliment to his dead friend in the following verses:

> Though once high Statius o'er dead Lucan's hearse,
> Would seem to fear his own hexameters,
> And thought a greater honour than that fear,
> He could not bring to Lucan's sepulchre;
> Let not our poets fear to write of thee,
> Great Jonson, king of English poetry,
> In any English verse, let none whoe'er,
> Bring so much emulation as to fear
> But pay without comparing thoughts at all,
> Their tribute—verses to thy funeral;
> Nor think whate'er they write on such a name,

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[8] Clarendon, *Life*, I, 39.

[9] Aubrey says that he was fond of "shamming"—*i. e.*, of telling "tall" stories.

[10] See below, pp. 136-7.

Can be amiss: if high, it fits thy fame;
If low, it rights thee more, and makes men see,
That English poetry is dead with thee;
Which in thy genius did so strongly live.—
Nor will I here particularly strive,
To praise each well composed piece of thine;
Or show what judgment, art, and wit did join
To make them up, but only (in the way
That Famanius honour'd Virgil) say,
The Muse herself was linked so near to thee,
Whoe'er saw one, must needs the other see;
And if in thy expressions aught seem'd scant,
Not thou, but Poetry itself, did want.[11]

But Jonson was not the only major playwright of the period with whom May could boast of friendship. That he was the friend of Massinger, Ford, and Shirley, the first at the height of his career, the two latter just beginning to achieve fame when May commenced to write for the stage, is suggested by the commendatory verses which he wrote for their plays. Verses by May, addressed "To his deserving Friend Mr. Philip Massinger," were prefixed to the 1626 edition of the latter's play *The Roman Actor;*[12] and similar verses "To My Deserving Friend Mr. James Shirley, upon his Comedy, the *Wedding*," introduced that play in the quarto of 1626.[13] As for May's friendship with Ford: when the latter was accused of having purloined the plot for *The Lover's Melancholy* from Shakespeare, May came to his defense with verses in which he sensibly pointed out that such working over of material should be judged only by its success.[14]

Since a record of May's private life, like that of so many bachelors, continues throughout his career to be the record of his personal friendships, we may disregard chronology for the moment

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[11] *The Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. W. Gifford (Introduction and Appendices by F. Cunningham), 9 vols., London, 1875. IX, 440.
[12] *The Roman Actor*, London, 1629. 4°. Sg. A3v.
[13] *Dramatic Works of James Shirley*, ed. Gifford and Dyce, London, 1833. lxx.
[14] See J. F. Bradley and J. Q. Adams, *The Jonson Allusion Book*, Yale University Press, 1922; 141.

to mention here those men who were his principal associates down to the time of the outbreak of the Civil Wars. Quite naturally, May was most intimate with men engaged in activities similar to his own, and it is not surprising that we discover direct evidence of his friendships with other playwrights and poets, particularly those younger men who from time to time were admitted to the circle which grouped itself about Ben Jonson. Thus May was the friend of Joseph Rutter, one of the younger members of the "tribe of Ben", for whose pastoral drama *The Shepherd's Holyday* in its first edition May wrote verses addressed "To My much respected Friend, Master Joseph Rutter, upon his Pastorall." Another friend was the celebrated Thomas Carew, who wrote a commendatory poem for May's play *The Heir*, in which he addressed the author in terms of greatest warmth. May was acquainted also with Charles Aleyn, for whose *Battles of Crescy and Poictiers* (1633) he wrote commendatory verses ("Doctissimo amico suo Carolo Aleino de nobili hoc Poemate"), and who, like May, was an alumnus of Sidney Sussex College; and with John Quarles (a much younger man, the son of Francis Quarles, author of the celebrated *Emblems*), for whose volume *Fons Lachrymorum* May wrote verses, and underneath whose picture, by Marshall, are lines signed "T. M."[15] Friendship with May was also claimed by Sir Aston Cokayne, the well-known dramatist and poet, in the following catalogue of his contemporaries:

> Donne, Suckling, Randolph, Drayton, Massinger,
> Habington, Sandys, May, my acquaintance were:
> Jonson, Chapman, and Holland I have seen.[16]

It is probable also that our author was on terms of friendship with John Selden, the distinguished scholar and antiquarian, an older man who would naturally have been attracted to the younger poet with classical tastes. Since Selden sided with the Parliament during the Wars, and was a member of the committee

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[15] *D. N. B.*, XLVII, 97.

[16] Quoted by W. C. Hazlitt, in *The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Thomas Randolph*, 2 vols., London, 1875. I, xii.

which drew up the articles of impeachment against Archbishop Laud, it is likely that this friendship continued after 1640.

Among the writers of the time, however, May's closest friend was Sir Richard Fanshawe, a graduate of Cambridge and a member of the Inner Temple, who in 1635 went to Spain as secretary to Lord Aston. Fanshawe is chiefly remembered as a translator; among his writings were English translations of the works of Horace, of Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, of the *Lusiad* ("Portugal's Historical Poem") by Luis de Camoens; a translation into Latin verse of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess;* and a dramatic romance in three acts, *To Love Only For Love's Sake*, adapted from the Spanish of Don Antonio de Mendoza. It was quite natural that men of such similar tastes as May and Fanshawe should have been intimates; Fanshawe's admiration for May is clearly expressed in Latin verses written in commendation of the latter's translation of Lucan.[17] The association between the two was broken off by the Civil Wars, for at the outbreak of armed hostilities Fanshawe joined the King at Oxford. Aubrey[18] asserts that one Emanual Decretz told him of the debate between May and Fanshawe "at their parting before Sir Richard went to the king, where both camps were rigorously banded;" and we may suppose that the separation caused by the wars was a source of sorrow to each.

But May's circle of friends was not composed entirely of professional writers. It is a well-known fact that many of the students at the Inns of Court, enjoying a youthful fling at Bohemianism before taking up their public careers, attached themselves to groups of writers whose conversation, presumably, was stimulating to these embryonic lawyers and statesmen. A conspicuous example is Lord Clarendon, who, when he was plain Mr. Hyde and a student at the Middle Temple, took pleasure in being a member of the group—and was according to his own account its principal figure—which gathered about Jonson. It was thus that Clarendon met May (his elder by fourteen years) and presumably admired him as a man of parts,

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[17] See below, p. 138.
[18] Aubrey, *op. cit.*, II, 56.

for he writes nothing but praise for May as he knew him in the years between 1625 and 1635; it is only of the May who was a "traitor" to the King that Clarendon speaks contemptuously.[19] It was thus too, no doubt, that May became acquainted with Sir Kenelm Digby, whose favor, as we shall see, our author later sought. Apparently closer to May than either Clarendon or Digby, however, was John Vaughan, who was later to have a distinguished career at the bar and upon the bench. Born in 1603, Vaughan had been educated at Christ Church, Oxford, and was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1620. According to Clarendon, his studies "disposed him to the least reverence to the crown and most to popular authority."[20] During the Wars Vaughan's sympathies wavered between the two parties; he was a member of the Long Parliament, but at times he lent a passive support to the royal cause. After the Restoration he was appointed Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and achieved considerable eminence as a jurist. That in his youth he was a close friend of May's is clear from Aubrey's express statement to that effect and from the circumstance that, like Jonson and others, he wrote commendatory verses for May's translation of Lucan.[21] It is interesting to speculate as to the nature of the friendship between May and Vaughan; it seems not improbable that, thrown together through mutual friends, they were drawn to each other by reason of the theoretical republicanism to which, as we have seen, they both adhered. Certainly it is evident that Vaughan was May's closest friend outside the literary profession.

As has been pointed out, it is only through these friendships that we get a glimpse—but a fleeting glimpse at best—of May's private life during the years of his authorship. Since he remained a bachelor, he probably spent most of his leisure hours in this society; and it is pleasant to think of him as being thus associated with many of the distinguished figures of this time. Having glanced at this interesting company, however, we must now return to May's career as an author. His plays, it may be said

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[19] *Life*, I, 34.
[20] See *D. N. B.*, LVIII, 167–168; and Clarendon, *Life*, I, 34.
[21] See below, p. 137.

at once, never achieved any conspicuous success in the theatres. Whatever their literary merits, they lacked the notes then popular; it is a characteristic worthy of comment that all his dramas, far from catching the temper of the time, are imitative of fashions which had had their hey-day a decade or so earlier. May's comedies, half-Jonsonian, half-Fletcherian, but lacking both Jonson's satiric bite and Fletcher's somewhat fleshly fascination, were little calculated to attract the pleasure-loving London playgoer to the theatres, nor, if he had paid his admission, to evoke his applause; certainly they could not compete successfully with the excitements offered by the more violent Fletcherian drama nor even with the boisterious vulgarities of the plays of such men as Brome. As for his Roman dramas, it may be said that they were born to failure. Even Ben Jonson's Roman plays had failed — gloriously, perhaps, but surely—on the stage; and May's tragedies, even though they come close to taking rank as the best in the Jonsonian tradition, had little chance for success in a decade even more romantic in its tastes than that which had rejected *Sejanus* and *Cataline*. By 1628, therefore, May found himself an unsuccessful playwright. That he felt a certain resentment at the refusal of the public to accept his plays is clear from a remark in the preface to his translation of Vergil's *Georgics* (1628):

> I think it better [to publish his translation] than publishing mine own fancies to the world, especially an age so much cloyed with cob-web inventions and unprofitable poems.[22]

There may be a hint of personal bitterness also in the following verses, which May wrote, years later, upon the publication of Shirley's works:

> Although thou want the theatre's applause,
> Which now is fitly silenc'd by the laws,
> Since these sad times that civil swords did rage
> And make three kingdoms the lamented stage
> Of real tragedies, it was not fit

[22] *Georgics*, London, 1628. Sg. A3ᵛ.

We quite should lose such monuments of wit
As flow'd from thy terse pen: the press alone
Can vindicate from dark oblivion
Thy *Poems*, friend: those that with skill can read,
Shall be thy judges now, and shall, instead
Of ignorant spectators, grace thy name
Though with a narrower, yet a truer fame,
And crown with longer life thy worthy pains.
All Muses are not guiltless; but such strains
As thine deserve, if I may verdict give,
In sober, chaste, and learned times to live.[23]

These lines are direct enough, and we need not, as some writers have done, condemn as hypocritical the words "fitly silenc'd," which certainly mean that theatrical tragedy is out of place in the presence of an actual national calamity. But it is perhaps not too fanciful to suppose that the phrases "ignorant spectators" and "those that with skill can read," while they are the customary gibe at the popular audience as contrasted with polite readers, are perhaps faint echoes of an old unhappiness.

But May was still in need of money, and he had no time to waste in lamentation; accordingly, he took another avenue to public favor. Even before the last of his plays had appeared, he had turned to a form of literary endeavor which must have been a pleasant and satisfying mode of expression for one of his classical, scholarly turn of mind. In the years between 1626 and 1631, May devoted himself largely to translations, a literary exercise which in the first half of the seventeenth century found a number of distinguished practitioners. May's translations include the following works: Lucan's *Pharsalia*, 1626, 1627; the *Georgics* of Vergil, 1628; some of the epigrams of Martial, 1629; parts of Barclay's allegorical-political romance *Argenis*, 1629; and the whole of the latter's *Icon Animorum*, 1631. Among his translations may also be included his own *Supplement*, or *Continuation*, to Lucan (1630), in both Latin and English, in which he carried the story of the Roman civil wars down to the death of Julius Caesar; and his play *The Tragedy of Antigone*

[23] *Dramatic Works of James Shirley, op. cit.*, xciii.

(1631), which, while it is far more than a translation and has already been mentioned among the plays, is interesting in this connection because it combines May's interest in the theatre with his interest in classical literature.

May's attachment to the literatures of Greece and Rome has already been mentioned, both with respect to his education and the influences affecting his plays. Among the authors whom he had read carefully may be listed the following: Vergil, Homer, Hesiod, Pindarus, Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, Suetonius, Herodotus, Aristotle, Varro, Junius, Higinius, Cornelius Celsus, Columella,[24] as well as such writers as Sophocles, Plutarch, Dion Cassius, Statius, and others whose work, in varying degrees, served as sources for his plays. To such a man, the task of translating the work of his favorite authors into English must have seemed all-important. It must have been, also, employment of the most congenial sort. It is not strange, therefore, that May's translation formed the basis of his reputation in his own day and as late as the eighteenth century.

But if May's translations were for him a labor of love, they were something more than that, too. There can be little doubt that May hoped, through them, to gain the favor of important personages who might, if they chose, help him to acquire the fame and fortune which the theatre had denied him. The evidence for such an assumption rests upon the nature of the verses dedicatory affixed to May's volumes of translations. The veritable significance of authors' dedications in the seventeenth century is a difficult one, largely because there is much conflicting evidence as to whether or not an author actually received a pecuniary reward from the noble or wealthy gentleman to whom he might dedicate his book. Patronage had come to mean less and less, until, of the period with which we are concerned, it can be said with certainty only that the professional writer looked to receive some reward for the compliment paid and that he might or might not receive such a reward.

Since May could not expect large compensation from the

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[24] This is a list of those authors whom he quotes in his notes to the translation of the *Georgics*.

actual sale of his translations, patronage remained as the sole source of income which his books might bring him. Accordingly, we find the majority of his volumes of translation dedicated to persons of wealth and position. The 1627 translation of Lucan included, in accordance with a not unusual practice, not one dedication, but seven, each book being prefaced with verses dedicated to a person of importance. The volume as a whole, as well as one of the books, was inscribed to William Earl of Devonshire, a former favorite pupil of the philosopher Hobbes, an intimate of James I, and a man noted for his lavish hospitality; in short, one who because of his generosity and his love of learning might reasonably be expected to reward handsomely a poet who pleased him. Other books are dedicated to Horatio Vere, Baron of Tilbury, the greatest of the "fighting Veres" and certainly the most distinguished professional soldier of the time; to Robert Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and Earl of Warwick; to Robert Bertie, the first Earl of Lindsay, who, after numerous exploits abroad, had returned home and in 1626 had become Lord Chamberlain of the royal household, and who, at the time May dedicated his poem to him, was riding the crest of a wave of royal favor; to Robert Earl of Essex, son of Elizabeth's Essex, who, in 1625 had been Vice-Commander of the Cadiz expedition. Most significant of all, perhaps, is the dedication of one of the books to William Earl of Pembroke, Lord High Steward of his Majesty's household, one of the dedicatees of the Shakespeare Folio, and a patron who, if he would, might do much to assist an impecunious poet. Similar dedications are to be found prefixed to May's other translations: the *Epigrams* of Martial (1629) were dedicated to Henry Earl of Holland, a member of the Privy Council and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge; and the translation of Barclay's *Icon Animorum* (1631), to Richard Weston, the celebrated Lord High Treasurer.

We do not know what financial success attended May's addresses to these noble gentlemen. It is clear, however, that his translations elevated him from the condition of "playwright" to that of "poet;" and that through that circumstance May became one of the professional writers who came to the favorable

attention of no less a person than King Charles himself. For, shortly after 1627, May emerged once more from obscurity and his name became associated with the Court. And since our judgment of his character and later behaviour depends largely upon a knowledge of his position at Court and his relations with the King, it becomes necessary to speak with some fulness of this phase of May's career.

The means by which May gained admission into courtly circles do not appear in the records. Perhaps he came first to Court through the friendly offices of Holland or Pembroke or Weston, all of whom, in the years immediately following the assassination of the favorite Buckingham, were as influential at Court as any in the realm; perhaps, too, he was helped by his cousin, Sir Humphrey May, who had served James faithfully and was at this time beginning to acquire a reputation as the apologist for Charles before the Parliament, particularly as the defender of the royal policy in the matter of ship-money. Whatever his introduction, however, the nature of May's connection with the Court seems clear enough. He was certainly not a courtier, in the strict sense of the term. He lacked the money and influence necessary to promote a career at Court; moreover, if poverty were not sufficient handicap, the annoying impediment in his speech would have made ridiculous any attempts on his part at that adroitness in speech which the age regarded as one of the most important of the courtier's accomplishments. Sufficient proof of the assertion that May was not a courtier is to be seen also in the circumstance that he was given no position or perquisites by the King, and that his name appears with extreme infrequency in official documents and memoirs of the period, two classes of records into which courtiers in the time of the Stuarts had the knack of insinuating their names. No, May cannot be regarded as a courtier playing at poetry, as Wat Montagu, for example, or a host of other gentlemen of the period played at poetry. He was, at most, merely one of the group of poets, important and unimportant, who hovered about the fringe of the Court. Charles himself, it is well-known, was something of a patron of the arts; and the Queen, although she was not a lady of literary tastes, was

frequently pleased to smile upon poets who complimented her. Moreover, Henrietta Maria had a great fondness for dramatic entertainment, and did much to continue during her husband's reign the tradition of the masque at Court which had reached magnificent heights in the time of Elizabeth and James. And Henrietta Maria did not content herself merely with encouraging such entertainments; it was, it will be recalled, a matter of some scandal, particularly to Puritans like Prynne, that the Queen had shamelessly consented to join her ladies-in-waiting in taking speaking parts in *The Shepherd's Paradise*, a pastoral designed by Wat Montagu and acted at Court in 1631. As a result of this royal interest in poetry and drama, the Court of Charles, despite the forebodings of political upheaval to come, was gay and crowded upon special occasions of state and entertainment, with great nobles and skilful courtiers paying assiduous attention to the royal personages, and with a host of lesser folk hovering at a distance—attendants, actors summoned in their professional capacity to play the more difficult parts in the masque, impoverished gentlemen who through luck or influence had gained admission to the charmed company, poets in search of employment or patronage—all anxious to be brought to the personal notice of the King or Queen and hoping to receive some material expression of royal favor. It was to this latter group, certainly, that May belonged.

We first hear of May in courtly circles upon the occasion of the King's visit to the fleet in 1627. For that ceremony our author wrote verses beginning:

> Oft may returning Janus here
> Find thee, great Charles, for every year
> He finds thee greater far.[25]

Through this poetical compliment, and perhaps others like it, May was brought to the attention of Charles; and in 1630, upon the publication of the *Continuation* of Lucan, he was permitted to dedicate that work to the King. The epistle dedicatory is characteristic of the age:

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[25] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 2d series, II (1627–28), 238.

To the Most High and Mighty Monarch Charles By the Grace of God King of Great Brittaine, France, and Ireland, &c.
Sir,

I should have taught my humble labors a lower presumption than to have approached your sacred hand, if I had onely weighed mine owne weakness and disabilitie; but the dignitie of this subject did somewhat encourage mee, being a reminder of that great Historie; whose former part was so richly dressed in the happy conceits, and high raptures of that Noble Lucan: of whose abilitie in writing I was not so ambitious in emulation, as officious in desire, to continue so stately an argument for your Princely eare: with what successe I have performed it, your Maiesties acceptation onely can determine; to whom if it present but the least delight, my end is accomplished, for which I have runne so great a hazard, as (perchance) to be censured a foile onely to Lucan's lustre; and chose rather to fall under the weight of a great argument, than to present a meane one to so high a hand: your Maiesties renowned worthy and Heroicall vertues (the perfection of minde meeting in you with the height of Fortune) may make you securely delighted in the reading of great actions; to whom I humbly present this weake Worke, beseeching Almighty God long to establish your Maiestie's Throne upon earth, enriching it with blessings of the right hand and the left; and after to Crowne you with incorruptible Glorie: So prayeth

Your Maiesties
most humble subject
Tho: May.[26]

It may be permitted me to point out here that this dedication must not be regarded as unduly fulsome or flattering. Flattery to a considerable degree was customary to the age; that it could be carried to extremes nothing short of revolting will be clear to anyone who will take the trouble to read the words with which Francis Bacon dedicated *The Advancement of Learning* to James I. There is little of this excessive servility in any of May's dedications. To Charles, of course, he paid the usual, somewhat exaggerated compliment (who in that day did not?) but underlying the flattery there is a note of dignity and restraint.

The *Continuation* of Lucan won the favor of Charles, and to some degree the King became May's patron. This is clear

[26] *Continuation*, 1630. Sg. A4r–A5v.

from the following lines of a contemporary, published in *Wits Recreations* in 1640:

> Thou son of Mercury whose fluent tongue
> Made Lucan finish his Pharsalian song,
> Thy fame is equal, better is thy fate.
> Thou has got Charles his love, he Nero's hate.[27]

Clarendon and Anthony à Wood give us further testimony on this point. Says Clarendon:

> Yet since his fortune could not raise his mind he brought his mind down to his fortune, by a great modesty and humility in his nature . . . He was cherished by many persons of honour, and very acceptable in all places . . . [and] had received a very considerable donative from the king.[28]

To this may be added the following statement of Anthony à Wood:

> Afterwards [i. e., after his graduation from Cambridge], he retired to, and mostly lived in, the city of Westminster, where performing divers things for the honour of this nation, never paralell'd [*sic*] by any English man before, was graciously countenanced by the king Charles I and his royal consort.[29]

Although we have no record of the actual amount of the "donative" mentioned by Clarendon, there is no reason to question his statement, or Wood's, that May became an object of the King's favor. That favor is further attested by the fact that May, according to his own statement, wrote his two historical poems, *The Reigne of King Henry the Second* (1633) and *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third* (1635), at the express command of the King. The dedication of the former reads:

> To The Sacred Maiestie of Charles By the Grace of God, King of Great

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[27] *Wits Recreations*, ed., 2 vols., London (no date), II, 12.
[28] *Life*, I, 39.
[29] *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, 810.

Brittaine, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. This historical Poem, Borne by his Command, and Not to Live but by His Gratious Acceptation, is Humbly Dedicated by the Author.[30]

The Epistle Dedicatory of the latter reads in part:

. . . For should your Maiesty vouchsafe to read it, as the precious howres of so great a Monarch (which made Horace affect shortness to Augustus Caesar) would tell me the poem were too long; so the iudicious Censure of so wise a Prince would make mee tremble at the defects of it. Those defects (whatsoever they may be) can be imputed only to insufficiency; for neither was their Argument wanting, nor yet endeavour, since I had the actions of a great King to require my skill, *and the Command of a greater King to obliege my care.*[31]

Nor did May, in the body of the poems, fail to compliment the Sovereign who had ordered them to be written. In several places the action of the poems is halted, while the poet pays tribute to his patron.

From the circumstance that he addressed these books to the King and received consequently some marks of the King's regard, it has been assumed by later writers that May was a constant attendant at Court and basked in the continual sunlight of Charles's smile. There is no evidence to support such a belief. That May was frequently at Court and was known personally to the King is obvious. But in this he differed no wit from a score of his fellow poets. The number of these who dedicated works to Charles is legion; and the "donative" given to May, whatever it may have been, was by no means comparable to those given by Charles to other poets. To mention just a few, Selden, Cotton and others were set to writing masques for the entertainment of the Court. George Sandys was granted exclusive rights to his translation of Ovid for a period of twenty-one years and was made a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to boot.[32] Lodowick Carlell was appointed

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[30] Sg. A8.
[31] *Edward III*, Sg. A3^{r}-A4^{r}.
[32] *D. N. B.*, L, 290–293.

Groom of the Privy Chamber and later one of the two keepers of the royal deer-park at Richmond.[33]

May received no such perquisites or honors. He is mentioned in none of the records of Court entertainments as having participated in their production. He was given no offices. His name does not appear in official papers. Instead, the only record of an actual appearance of his at court occurs in a contemporary letter; and the anecdote there told indicates only too clearly that while May was known to Charles, who admired his poetry, he was not well-known at Court. This episode, which is worth giving in detail, is recounted in a letter, dated 27 February, 1633–4, from one G. Gerrard to the Earl of Strafford:

> On Monday after Candlemas-day, the Gentlemen of the Inns of Court performed their Masque at Court; they were sixteen in Number, who rode through the Streets in four Chariots, and two others to carry their Pages and Musicians, attended by an Hundred Gentlemen on great Horses, as well clad as ever I saw any, they farre exceeded in Bravery any Masque that had formerly been presented by those Societies, and performed the dancing Part with much applause . . . They were well used at Court by the King and Queen, no Disgust given them, only this one Accident fell, Mr. May of Gray's-Inn, a fine Poet, he who translated Lucan, came athwart my Lord Chamberlain in the Banquetting House, and he broke his staff over his Shoulders, not knowing who he was, the King present, who knew him, for he calls him his Poet, and told the Chamberlain of it, who sent for him the next Morning, and fairly excused himself to him, and gave him fifty Pounds in Pieces. I believe he was the more indulgent for his names sake.[34]

The Lord Chamberlain who thus attacked May was Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, who in 1626 had succeeded his brother William as Chamberlain, and who, upon the latter's death in 1630, had become fourth Earl of Pembroke. As Lord Chamberlain, it was one of his many important duties to preserve the order of the Court, a responsibility which it was not always easy to perform. Unlike his brother William, a man of splendid

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[33] Charles H. Gray, *Lodowick Carliell*, Univ. of Chicago Dissertation, Chicago, 1905. 28 ff.

[34] Wm. Knowler, *The Earl of Strafford's Letters and Dispatches*, 2 vols., London, 1739. I, 207.

manners and elegant accomplishments, Philip Herbert was a man of irascible temperament, and was notorious for the violence with which he sometimes exercised his office. His castigation of May was obviously unjustified, since the unfortunate poet had apparently collided with him by mere accident. Speaking of Pembroke with reference to this very incident, Francis Osborne wrote:

> This I can attest of the man, that he was intolerable cholerick and offensive, and did not refraine, whilest he was chamberlaine, to break many wiser heads than his owne: Mr. May, that translated Lucan, having felt the weight of his staffe; which, had not his office, and the place, being the banquetting house, protected, I question whether he would ever have strook againe.[35]

However that may be, from the facts of this episode certain points stand out clearly. Most important is the date—1634—at which time May had certainly received as much favor from Charles as he was ever to get. Had he been an habitué of the Court, Pembroke, as Lord Chamberlain, certainly would have known him as a protegé of Charles, and would scarcely have dared to lay violent hands upon him. Pembroke must have been well aware whom he could attack with impunity and whom he could not. Certainly, if this episode means anything, it means that in 1634, when he was at the height of his career, May was at best merely on the outer edges of court life. From the evidence of the letter, he might have been merely one of the hundred and sixteen gentlemen of the Inns of Court who had come to Whitehall to perform the masque. As a matter of fact, the latter is probably the case. A careful examination of the facts of this episode leads one to conclude, therefore, that May was merely a professional poet whose work was known to the King, and whose fortune it had been to be presented to the King in person; but that his actual connection with the Court was limited to infrequent attendance upon special occasions and an acquaintance with some of the more or less influential gentlemen who haunted Whitehall.

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[35] Francis Osborne, *Traditional Memoirs* (in *The Secret History of James the First*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1811. I, 222.)

The two habitués of the Court whom May seems to have known and whose patronage he seems to have sought during this period—that is, between 1630 and 1639—were Endymion Porter and Sir Kenelm Digby. Both of these gentlemen were noted not only as courtiers but also as patrons of arts and letters. It seems to have been the fashion to dedicate books to Endymion Porter; Herrick, Dekker, and Davenant, as well as numerous lesser lights, took this means of securing his favor. To this gentleman, then at the height of his fortune, May dedicated, in 1631, his *Tragedy of Antigone the Theban Princesse.* A modern biographer of Porter [36] infers from this fact that May received gifts from Endymion Porter; and there is no reason to question her assertion, since the dedication was doubtless written with some such end in view. In his cultivation of Sir Kenelm Digby, May was somewhat more assiduous. Digby, one of the most interesting figures of this period, was himself something of a poet. He was a friend of both Ben Jonson and Clarendon, and it was possibly through them that May met him and his wife, the beautiful and notorious Venetia. When the latter died in 1633, May wrote an elegiac poem in her honor, as did also Ben Jonson, Aurelian Townshend and others. May's verses begin:

> If Arte were proper for a mourning Dress
> If dull amazinge sorrow could express
> It's selfe, in number sweet, in graceful Ryme,
> Or keepe for sighs, or sobs, a tunefull tyme,
> How could I wishe, faire soule, that I had skill
> To clothe so true a grief that from my quill
> The brightest pearles, that Helicon e're knewe
> Or was admir'd, might drop: that I could shew
> The brightest pearls, uppon thy honor'd grave,
> That all the Gardens of the Muses haue:
> And that my selfe knowne in no verse might bee
> But in the sorrow I express for thee.[37]

The remaining lines of the Elegy are in much the same tone.

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[36] Dorothea Townshend, *Life and Letters of Endymion Porter*, London, 1897. 131.

[37] Ashmolean MS., 38. No. 192.

When Sir Kenelm himself, sometime in the 'thirties, wrote his "Observations on the 22nd Stanza in the Ninth Canto of the Second Book of Spenser's Faerie Queene," May addressed the learned commentator as follows:

> As wee esteeme the greatest Princes blest
> To have their worth by a blest Penne exprest
> So may wee thinke best Poets happier then
> When they are read and fam'd by worthy Men.
> Such is thy fate, brave Spencer, thou hast found
> A noble knowing Reader, that can sound
> Thy mysticke depths, one that can give thy due,
> And make the Age beleive his Censure true.
> A Sydney dy'd to kille thy bleeding hart,
> A Digby lives to fame thy charming Art:
> Brave Sydney's Arts, and Spirrit in him are knowne,
> And Hee, noe lesse than Sydney is thine owne.
> Such is thy Digby, such thy Sydney was
> I could almost beleive Pythagoras.[38]

Finally, in 1639, May dedicated to Digby the volume in which were published the two tragedies, *Cleopatra Queene of Aegypt*, and *Julia Agrippina, Empresse of Rome.*

The fact that May thus sought the favor of one of the most active members of the Roman Catholic faction might lead one to suspect that May himself was attached to that faith or at least that he sought to curry favor with its adherents. Such, however, was not the case. Even while he was addressing himself to Sir Kenelm Digby, May was expressing his disapproval of the Roman Church with a forthrightness which leaves no doubt concerning his position in this respect. In the *Reigne of King Henry the Second*, he has much to say concerning Rome, and none of it is complimentary. His opinions are not those of a man anxious to ingratiate himself with Henrietta Maria and the party of the Jesuits. As a matter of fact, May's relations with Endymion Porter and Sir Kenelm Digby were simply those of poet and patron. He sought their favor for the gifts they might give him, and it is probable that they obliged him.

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[38] British Museum, Additional MS. 25,303. f. 187.

Through his acquaintance with them, however, as well as through his occasional visits to Court, May had some knowledge of court life; and it is a credit to his independence, perhaps, that he always spoke of it, even in his earlier writings, with contempt. Thus, there may be a reflection of his opinion of the English court in one or two passages in *Agrippina*. After Crispinus and Geta have been dismissed as commanders of the Praetorian guard, Geta storms against Caesar and Agrippina, but Crispinus consoles him by saying:

> Hee gives us ease, and freedome, to retire,
> And taste the sweetes of privacy, and there
> Enjoy our lives free from the glorious noise,
> And troubles of a Court . . .[39]

Such sentiments are frequent, of course, in both English and Roman pastoral poetry with which May was familiar; at the same time, the passage may possibly have some basis in the writer's actual observation. Again, when Petronius, a typical courtier, is told that Caesar is dying, he says:

> There have been other wayes to end a Prince
> Besides old age. But what is that to us?
> Come lets away and shew our forwardnesse
> To joy or mourning as occasion serves.
> I am prepar'd for both . . .[40]

Here again, the satiric bias of Petronius must be kept in mind; but it is not impossible that May had in mind those English courtiers—like Bacon, for example—who were always ready to serve the party of the moment. In his *History of Parliament*,[41] likewise, May frequently alludes to the Court with a circumstantiality which amply attests his familiarity with courtly practices; and the satiric note in his comments suggests that even while he was seeking patronage his shrewd eye had perceived the follies and the vices of Stuart royalty and their attendants.

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[39] Act II, Scene ii.
[40] Act III, Scene ii.
[41] For characteristic passages, see Book I, 20 ff.

III

The Laureateship—Later Career

The death of Ben Jonson in 1637 left vacant two offices—the poet-laureateship and the position of chronicler to the City of London. For the second of these offices May was recommended to the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen by the King, as well as by the Earl of Dorset and the same Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery who a few years before had broken his staff over the unfortunate poet's head.[1] The King's letter is preserved among the state papers:

> The King to [the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London]. We understand that the place of historian to the city of London is become void by the death of Benjamin Johnson. We recommend Thomas May, whom we know to be every way qualified for that employment, expecting that you forthwith choose him to the said place. [August? 1637. Draft by Secretary Windebank.][2]

From these letters it is obvious that May still had a place as poet in the royal consciousness, and that the King, although he had not given him a position about the Court, was anxious to reward him thus vicariously. But the city fathers did not choose him "forthwith," as the King had commanded. By 1637, the Puritan aldermen were in a frame of mind which led them to oppose the King on every point, however small; and it is probable that their failure to make May official historiographer was due to nothing except an inclination to annoy their sovereign. Certainly, as the King had said, May was qualified for the post—more so than Jonson, who had been notoriously lax in the performance of the duties of the office. As a matter of fact, no appointment at all was made until two years later, when the post was given to Francis Quarles.

It seems likely that May hoped also to be appointed to the vacant laureateship. Aubrey says that "he stood candidate

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[1] *Index to the Remembrancia*, London, 1878; 304–5, 306.
[2] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1637. Series 2, II, 395.

for the laurell after B. Jonson; but Sir William Davenant carried it—*manet alta mente repositum* perhaps."[3] Whether or not May had serious hopes of being made laureate is a question that cannot be answered; probably he had, since Charles had gone so far as to recommend him for the other post. On the other hand, there were men, the successful candidate Davenant among them, whose poetical reputations far exceeded May's, and against whom he could not seriously hope to compete. As a matter of fact, however, every poet and poetaster of the time had some small hope of the honor. Suckling, in his well-known "A Session of the Poets," mentions more than a score who had ambitions: among them are such major poets as Davenant, Waller and Carew; minor figures like Sandys, Rutter and Aurelian Townshend; small-poets and Court favorites like Endymion Porter, Wat Montague, Toby Matthew, and Sir Kenelm Digby; and others whose names are so obscure as to find no place in the most comprehensive histories, literary and social, of the time. Among the persons thus listed is May:

> There was Selden, and he sat hard by the chair;
> Wenman not far off, which was very fair;
> Sands with Townsend, for they kept no order;
> Digby and Shillingsworth a little further
> . . . . . And
> There was Lucan's translator, too . . .[4]

None of these men stands out as a formidable rival to Davenant, who, in addition to his wide reputation as dramatist and poet, enjoyed the favor of both Charles and Henrietta Maria.

But although May was not an important candidate, he nevertheless resented, by his own confession, the King's failure to provide for him, either with the laureateship or in some other way. Among the manuscripts in the British Museum there is a poem which is interesting because it is the only bit of writing by May which is openly and obviously autobiographical. In it he laments the impediment in his speech which has kept him from practising

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[3] *Brief Lives*, II, 56.
[4] John Suckling, *Works* (ed. Hazlitt), 2 v., London, 1892; I, 7 ff.

any of the learned professions, and also the fact that authorship has been an unprofitable occupation. The verses are as follows:

> Neede must best Learning, there where Nature's wrong
> Denyes the comon freedome of the Tongue,
> Or sleepe, or else be damned to the Quille,
> To feede on fork'd Parnassus barren hill,
> Guerdon'd with naught but leane & hungry bayes,
> Wanting a Tongue, shee findes noe thriving waies,
> In schooles or pleading Courte to bee exprest.
> Pulpitts have wealth, soe hath Minerva's chest:
> But ablest Pennes can challenge naught; but crave
> Those aydes w^{ch} Learning would disdaine to have;
> Nor can they find those Aides, the ffates conspire,
> Princes themselves have learn'd but to admire,
> And praise the truest and most lasting frame
> As children doe their peacockes beauteous traine.
> Learning, that wantes a Tongue, can truely tell
> How bootlesse 'tis to write though ne're soe well.[5]

Although in the manuscript these verses are undated, it is probable that they were written shortly after the laureateship went to Davenant. May's is the usual lamentation of the writer who has found the business of authorship financially unprofitable. It is also, perhaps, the lament of a man who, for professional reasons, has been forced to seek patronage from those whose principles he both disagreed to and detested.

When, in 1640, the open break between Charles and the Parliament could no longer be averted, May espoused the Parliamentary cause and set to work as a publicist to explain and justify the principles of his party to the world. His political enemies at once attributed his desertion of the King to his disappointment at not obtaining the post of laureate, and they excoriated him savagely in their writings. The earliest of these attacks which attribute his change of party to spleen rather than principle is to be found in *Mercurius Vapulans*, one of the innumerable "Mercurius" papers which appeared during the war

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[5] British Museum, Additional Manuscript, 25, 303. f. 186 b.

After commenting on various Parliamentary apologists, the writer says:

> Another though he calls not himself Mercury, yet is *Majanatus*, who failing of the laureat wreath, envies the Crowne it selfe, and puts his fictions into grave pose, as if he stood to be City Chronicler.[6]

The bias of such a statement as this will be evident to anyone who is familiar with the quality of the invective used by the pamphleteers of the period. The first reputable writer to repeat the charge against May was Fuller, who wrote in 1662, after the Restoration:

> Some disgust at court was given to, or taken by him (as some will have it) because his bays were not gilded richly enough, and his verses rewarded by king Charles according to his expectation.[7]

Fuller was writing long after May's death, and from hearsay, as appears from the inaccuracy of other statements concerning May; from the mildness of the indictment and the qualification "as some will have it," it would seem that Fuller did not take the accusation too seriously.

More severe and positive is the version of May's former friend, Clarendon:

> . . . upon his majesty's refusing to give him a small pension, which he had designed and promised to another very ingenious person, whose qualities he thought inferior to his own, he fell from his duty, and all his former friends, and prostituted himself to the vile office of celebrating the infamous acts of those who were in rebellion against the King; which he did so meanly, that he seemed to all men to have lost his wits, when he left his honesty; and so shortly after died miserable and neglected, and deserves to be forgotten.[8]

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[6] *Mercurius Vapulans: or the Whipping of poore British Mercury set out in a Letter directed to him from Mercurius Urbanus, younger Brother to Aulicus.* [Dated 4 Nov., 1643, in a contemporary MS. note in the British Museum copy.] p. 2.

[7] *History of the Worthies of England* (ed. Nuttall), 3 v., London, 1840; III, 259.

[8] *Life*, I, 39–40.

And Wood added to the story, already distorted, the touch accusing May of atheism:

> . . . but he found not that preferment from either [the King and Queen], which he expected, grew discontented, sided with the presbyterians upon the turn of the times, became a debauchee *ad omnia*, entertained ill principles as to religion, spoke often very slightly of the Holy Trinity, kept beastly and atheistical company . . . and endeavour'd to his power to asperse and invalidate the king and his cause . . .[9]

The political bias of Royalists like Clarendon and Wood is apparent in the excesses of their language and in the untruthfulness of the statement that May died neglected. Such Royalist animadversions upon a Parliament man are worthless as evidence. Later writers, however, have followed them blindly.[10] One contemporary, on the other hand, defended May. This was the Puritan author (possibly George Wither) of "The Great Assizes Holden on Parnassus by Apollo and his Assessours," 1645, where it is flatly denied that May was actuated by spite. In that poem, May is one of a jury (the others are Wither, Carey, Davenant, Sylvester, Sandys, Drayton, Beaumont, Fletcher, Heywood, Shakespeare, and Massinger), impanelled by Apollo to try such journals as *Mercurius Britannicus* and *Mercurius Aulicus* on charges of abuse of privilege. Each of the journals makes a defense, but *Mercurius Aulicus* challenges May's presence on the jury:

> To which the Pris'ner pleads his innocence,
> And puts himselfe upon a legall tryall,
> But he withall exhibits a denyall
> Against a Jurour, for his suit it was,
> That May on his arraignment might not passe:
> For though a Poet hee must him confesse,
> Because his writings did attest no lesse;
> Yet he desir'd hee might be set aside,

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[9] *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, 810.

[10] Cf. Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum* (ed. Sir Egerton Brydges), 2v., Geneva, 1824; II, 19–20; and D. E. Baker and Isaac Reed, *Biographia Dramatica*, 3 v., London, 1812; I, 502.

Because hee durst not in his truth confide:
Of May among twelve moneths he well approv'd,
But May among Twelve men hee never lov'd:
For hee beleev'd that out of private spite
He would his conscience straine, t'undoe him quite.
Hee likewise of offences him accus'd,
Whereby his King Apollo was abused:
And with malicious arguments attempts
To prove him guilty of sublime contempts,
But chiefly he indeavour'd to conclude,
That hee was guilty of ingratitude:
Which crime Parnassus Lawes doe so oppose,
As in that State, it for high Treason goes.

Then May stept forth, and first implor'd the grace
And leave of Phoebus to maintaine his case:
Then to the Learned Consistory sues,
That they would him or censure, or excuse:
Then calls the Gods, and all whom they protect,
The Starres, and all on whom they doe reflect;
The Elements, and what's compos'd of these,
Him to acquit from all disloyalties.
If by just proofes (said hee) thou canst evince,
That I have been ungratefull to my Prince,
Then let mee from these groves bee now exil'd
To Scythian snowes, or into deserts wild;
Yea, I invoke the Gods that I may feele
The Gyants valour, or Ixions wheele,
If it bee found I have transgressed thus,
As 'tis informed by lying Aulicus.
Apollo then darts forth an awfull ray
From his impiercing eye, which silenc'd May,
So Kings (if they be just) may rule like Gods,
And be observed by their lookes, and nods.
He Aulicus rebuk'd, because hee knew
His accusations from meere malice grew:
And him advis'd in peace to stand aside,
If hee desir'd with favour to be try'd.[11]

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[11] *The Great Assizes Holden on Parnassus*, 1645. Reprinted in No. 40 of the Spenser Society Publications, London, 1885; 15–17.

In his own lifetime, therefore, the opinion that May joined Parliament because of disappointed ambition was not universally held. To be sure, the King had not made him laureate, and he was disappointed. On the other hand, even though he had not received the laureateship, he had been recommended by Charles for the post of city historiographer, a circumstance which must have soothed his wounded sensibilities, since that office was as much as he could reasonably expect. If, therefore, May had been disposed to give his allegiance to one party merely because of personal spleen towards the other, it is just as likely that he would have sided with Charles, who had tried to secure an office for him, and would have opposed the Puritans who, in the persons of their representatives the City fathers, had denied him that office.

In one sense, certainly, May was disloyal to the King whose protegé, in a minor way, he had been. Moreover, it is possible, since he became secretary and historian of Parliament, that it was merely the hope of gainful employment that attracted him to the party of reform. Certainly in 1640, as at all other times, many men were guided by opportunism rather than by principle. On the other hand, it would be unwarranted cynicism to suppose that May's decision was in no way influenced by sincere political belief. As we have seen, he had cultivated the King's favor through necessity; it is conceivable that even while so doing he had felt no sympathy with the King's government nor with the political corruption that was abroad in the land. Such behavior naturally involves some indirectness; but many a man besides Thomas May has been forced to compromise between necessity and ideals, and finally to choose between loyalty to a bad cause and apparent disloyalty for the sake of a principle. Others who had received greater favors from Charles than May forsook their King—Pembroke, Essex, and Sir Edward Coke, among the great ones of the realm; Selden and Vaughan among the people with whom May had been wont to associate.

As a matter of fact, there are many indications that May opposed the King upon principle. The fact that he was a graduate of Sidney Sussex College, a nursery of Puritanism and the *alma mater* of Oliver Cromwell, has already been mentioned.

So also has the statement of Aubrey (and Aubrey repeated it for emphasis) that May's study of Lucan and other Roman poets had made him "in love with the republique, which tang stuck by him." Moreover, he was a native of a part of England which strongly opposed the King's cause; as he himself writes:

> The Eastern end of Sussex (it being a long and narrow County lying for many miles upon the Sea) stood firm to the Parliament and were very industrious in settling of the Militia, by which means they were so happie, as to preserve themselves in peace and quietnesse.[12]

If May kept up any connections with Sussex, and it seems probable that he did,[13] it is likely that he was influenced by such local opinion. In addition, he belonged to a social class which furnished Parliament with some of its strongest supporters. The position of this group is admirably stated by Professor Trevelyan, who is summarizing the opinions of such writers as Clarendon and Mrs. Hutchinson:

> The descendants of clothiers, who purchased old lands with new money, or of the richer yeomen who 'gentleised' their sons, were sooner or later accepted into the circle of [county] families, many of whom had risen in the same way after the Black Death or the fall of the monasteries. But the period of social probation was irritating to such aspirants while it lasted, and is said to have been a frequent cause of Roundhead proclivities in the Great War.[14]

It was this group of rising landed gentry which produced Cromwell. It was to this group, as we have seen, that the May family belonged: the poet's grandfather was a yeoman farmer and iron-founder who purchased old estates; the poet's father, Sir Thomas, had purchased Mayfield and had certainly attempted to "gentleise" his son. While the point is impossible of proof, it is not improbable that his extraction played its part in influencing May's decision.

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[12] *History of Parliament*, 1647; II, 108.

[13] John May, Anthony May, and *Thomas May the poet* are named in the list of Sussex gentry included in the Visitation of Sussex of 1634. See *Sussex Archeological Collections*, XXXIX, 112.

[14] *England Under the Stuarts*, London, 1920; 5.

Apart from such matters as these, however, May had seen enough and heard enough, during his years on the outer edge of the Court circle, to make any man of patriotic impulse feel disgusted with the Stuarts and their Court. In the *History of Parliament* he tells how "great Statesmen and Privy Counsellors would ordinarily laugh at the ancient Language of England, when the word Liberty of the Subject was named;" and how the "younger Courtiers were usually heard to wish Scotland under water."[15] But he adds,

> These Gentlemen, who seemed so forward in taking up their own yoake, were but a small part of the Nation (though a number considerable enough to make a Reformation hard) compared with those Gentlemen who were sensible of their birth-rights, and the true interest of the Kingdome.[16]

He tells of the pernicious influence of Buckingham, who was "like an unhappy vapour exhaled from the earth to so great an height, as to cloud not only the rising, but the setting Sunne."[17] From the circumstantiality of his account,[18] it seems likely that he was one of the crowd in Westminister Palace Yard who saw Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton put in the pillory and have their ears cut off. And he seems to have been greatly revolted by the spectacle, as well a man might be.

But, although these things were enough to make a decent man oppose the King's party, May went over to the other side and took up his work as Parliamentary apologist only with great reluctance and from a sense of duty. In writing of the unhappy times, he says, he

> . . . wished more than life, that for the public-sake, his theme could rather have been, the prosperity of these nations, the honour and happiness of the King, and such a blessed condition of both, as might have reached all the ends, for which government was first ordained in the world.[19]

Surely these words have in them the note of sincerity.

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[15] I, 18–19; 47.
[16] *Ibid.*, I, 18.
[17] *Ibid.*, I, 6.
[18] *Ibid.*, I, 79.
[19] *Ibid.*, Introduction.

May did not cast his lot with the Parliament because of any promise of immediate reward; for, as we shall see, he achieved no official position or stipend until 1645. He himself tells us that there was more hope of preferment from the King than from the Parliament. Speaking of those gentlemen who waited until battle was literally joined at Edgehill before they openly aligned themselves with either faction, he says:

> . . . many of them, who before as Neuters had stood at gaze, in hope that one quick blow might clear the doubt, and save them the danger of declaring themselves, came now in, and readily adhered to that side, where there seemed to be least feares and greatest hopes, which was the King's Party; for on the Parliament side the incouragements were onely publike, and nothing promised but the free enjoyment of their native Liberty; no particular honours, preferments, or Estates of Enemies; and on the other side, no such totall ruine could be threatened from a victorious Parliament, being a body as it were of themselves, as from an incensed Prince, and such hungry followers, as usually go along with Princes in those waies. And how much private interest will oversway publike motions, Books of History, rather than Philosophy, will truly informe you; for concerning humane actions and dispositions, there is nothing under the Sunne which is absolutely new.[20]

A modern writer says that May was attached to Fairfax, and that he frequently took up military quarters during the Civil Wars.[21] There is, apparently, no evidence to support this assertion. He did visit Hull, however, when that city was besieged by the Earl of Newcastle's forces in September, 1643; and he wrote to a friend in London concerning the situation:

> . . . they [the Earl's forces] have cast up severall Works against the Towne, and planted divers Pieces of Batteries in them and daily make many shots against it, but blessed bee God have done little hurt, although they have shot many 36-pound bullets, especially upon the last Lord's Day when wee were at church, they came flying over it and flew into the Market place but did no hurt but to a Malignant's Chimneys.[22]

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[20] *Ibid.*, III, 29–30.
[21] M. Guizot, *Monk's Contemporaries* (trans. A. R. Scoble), London, 1851; 62.
[22] *A True Relation from Hull*, 1643; 1, 2. See below, p. 174.

The whole tone of the account is that of a civilian observer; as far as I have been able to discover, this is the only occasion upon which May smelled the actual smoke of battle.

But although he did not take up active military service, May proved valuable to the Parliamentary cause in another way—namely, as a publicist. His first writings were apparently unofficial. In 1642 he published a pamphlet entitled *A Discourse Concerning the Success of Former Parliaments*, in which he sketched briefly the parliamentary tradition in England. This work must have proved pleasing to his party, which, with characteristic British love of tradition, was anxious to justify itself not only in terms of absolute justice but also in the light of precedent. Shortly after this, May must have published an account of the battle of Newbury; for in a pamphlet already mentioned,[23] the writer jeers at "Majanatus," and says:

> . . . and sure however Poets have got an ill name, I had rather beleeve in the supplement of Lucan, then the relation of the battell of Newbury.

The same work brought May to the attention of John Taylor the Water-Poet, who, after describing himself as "Water-poet Laureate," adds:

> . . . if my place be not sequestred for the use of Tho. May for his Poeticall relation of his Excellencies Victory at Newburry, and more Poeticall interpretation of Touch Not Mine Anoynted.[24]

May's story of Newbury has not survived. It seems certain, however, that Taylor's adjective "poetical" means merely that the narrative was fanciful.

About this time, also, May must have contributed to the series of pamphlets called *Mercurius Britannicus*. The work of John Taylor quoted above is an analysis of one number of this series, and May is mentioned as a contributor:

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[23] *Mercurius Vapulans*, 1643. See above, pp. 56-57.

[24] *Mercurius Aquaticus, or, The Water Poets Answer to All That Hath or Shall be Writ by Mercurius Britanicus*, 1643. Sg. A2r.

Though I thought it beneath my penne to dip into the lies, Follies and Calumnies of such a foolish London pamphlet, yet because I was informed, it was not the Act of one but many, which for a while made mee think this monster-piece of vanitie was the abortive issue of Mr. Saltmarsh the Scribe . . . Tom May the *Contriver* and chiefe Engineer, but that I thought he was better at Translation than Invention . . .[25]

Taylor, as is well known, was one of the most scurrilous of the writers on the Royalist side, and he frequently belabored May with considerable clumsiness and little wit. In one place he writes that:

. . . thou [John Booker] with thy Consorts, *May*, *Wither*, *Britannicus*, the *Scout*, the *Dove*, and all the Rabble of lying and reviling Rebells, cannot so much as scratch my reputation, much lesse can they wound either *Aulicus* or *Naworth*, and least of all can they batter with Elder-guns and paper-bullets either majesty or loyalty."

Later in the same work he gives a recipe for a medicine, compounded of, among other things, "Brownisticall zeale," "Anabaptisticall duty, sacrilegious sanctity, Hypocrites purity," which,

when it is well beaten, mix it with the Braines of *Booker*, *May*, *Wither*, *Mercurius Britannicus*, *Prinne*, and two or three hundred Knaves Braines more, it is an approved medicine for the encrease of Rebellion, for the grumbling in the gizzard, the flux of the Tongue, or the melancholy mubble-fubbles, provided it be taken fasting (upon a full stomacke) at five of the clocke in the morning after Dinner.[26]

Such attacks as these need no comment; but they are interesting to us because they indicate that in the years 1642-4, May must have been active as a pamphleteer, else he would not have drawn Taylor's somewhat ineffective fire, nor would his name have been mentioned so frequently in connection with *Mercurius Britannicus*.

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[25] *Ibid.*, Sg. 2[r] & v.

[26] *Iohn Taylor, Being Yet unhanged, send greeting, to Iohn Booker*, etc. [London], 1644. Sg. A2[r]-A4[v]. (Reprinted in Publications of the Spenser Society, No. 14, London, 1873.)

It is not clear in what way or through what influence May became Secretary of Parliament and one of that body's official apologists. The writer of the article on May in the *Biographia Britannica* suggests that he was received into the favor of Parliament through the interest of a Republican general, probably Sir Thomas Fairfax.[27] There is no evidence for this assertion, however, and no mention of May is made in either the voluminous Fairfax correspondence or the numerous biographies of the great general. It is more likely that May's pamphlets had come to the attention of the Parliamentarians. May was also, it will be remembered, a distinguished Latinist. Such a man could be useful to Parliament in the work of preparing Latin tracts for circulation on the Continent; and Parliament, as is well known, was anxious to justify itself in the eyes of the continental powers. These considerations, it seems to me, are sufficient explanation why May was made Secretary of Parliament. It is unnecessary to assume the good offices of Fairfax or anyone else.

The exact date of May's appointment as Secretary of Parliament does not appear in the records. It came before July, 1645; for in that month he was one of the Secretaries to whom license was granted to publish "a booke entitled 'The King's Cabinet Opened',"[28] which consisted of a reprint of the letters written in the King's hand and taken from the cabinet captured on the field at Naseby. Later in that year, the Parliament granted May a comfortable salary, as appears from the following order of the Commons:

> *Ordered* . . . That the sum of Two hundred Pounds per Annum Pension be paid to Mr. Sadler and Mr. May, Secretaries for the Parliament; to each of them, during their Lives, out of the King's, Queen and Princes Revenue, to be paid quarterly; the first Payment to commence and to be accounted from the Five-and-twentieth Day of December last.
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> *Ordered* . . . That the sum of Two hundred Pounds be forthwith advanced and paid, by the Committee of the Revenue, to Mr. Sadler and Mr. May;

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[27] P. 3068. It was this suggestion, no doubt, which led Guizot (*op. cit.*) to suppose that May was attached to Fairfax.

[28] *Stationers' Register* (ed. Eyre and Rivington), 3 v., London, 1913–14; I (entry 9 July, 1645).

to each of them One hundred Pounds; for the Pains they have taken in the Service, and by the Command, of the Parliament.[29]

The order is dated "19 Januarie, 1645"—that is, 1646 New Style; so that "twentieth Day of December last" means 20th December, 1645.

Any account of May's career between 1645 and his death in 1650 must consist almost entirely of a record of his writings for the Parliament, since there is little evidence concerning his private life during this period. On the same day that the Commons granted him a yearly stipend of £200, it was also ordered that letters and papers be turned over to the Secretaries, and that

Mr. Sadler and Mr. May be required with all speed, to expedite the Declaration, setting forth the State of this great Cause, undertaken by the Parliament, appointed to be prepared by them, by order of this House; and to offer it to the Committee appointed for that Purpose; to the end it may be presented to the House, and speedily published.[30]

What this "declaration" was, or whether it was ever published, does not appear; there is no record of it to be found in the *Stationers' Register*, and I have found no book which might possibly be identified with the one thus ordered to be written.[31] Meanwhile, however, May and Sadler joined in the publication of a pamphlet entitled *The Lord George Digby Cabinet and Dr. Goff's Negotiations* (1646), which consisted largely of Digby's correspondence, with prefatory remarks by the two secretaries.

In 1647 appeared May's *History of the Parliament of England*, written, according to the Stationers' Register, "by order and command of the houses of Par."[32] This work, which is May's principal achievement in prose, will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. It is interesting to note here, however, that in May, 1647, an order was introduced into the House of Commons which would have punished "all such as shall print, reprint, sell or utter, any of the said Books [May's *History*], without the said Author's License, according to the Custom in such cases."

[29] *Commons Journal*, IV, 410.
[30] *Ibid.*, IV, 410.
[31] It could not have been *The History of Parliament*, since that was the work of May alone.
[32] *Transcript of the Stationers' Register* (*op. cit.*,) I, 263.

But when the order was put to the question, the House, feeling perhaps that its own rights in the book were equal to May's, decided in the negative.[33] This *History* was followed, in 1650, by the *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium* in Latin; and shortly thereafter this latter work appeared in English, under the title, *A Breviary of the History of Parliament.* The tone of this book is less reasoned and more eulogistic than that of the earlier *History.* It is probable that it was written to justify, in more forceful language than had yet been used, the Parliament, which was experiencing at the moment a painful loss of self-confidence as a result of its own unwisdom in executing the King.

May lived, according to his own account, "during these Wars, in the quarters, and under the protection of the Parliament"[34] —that is, presumably, in the neighborhood of Westminster near his old haunts in Stephen's Alley. Before his official connection with Parliament, he perhaps lived in the City. He was probably the Thomas May of Allhallows the Great, who in 1644 was assessed £40 by the committee for the advance of money.[35] During this period, according to Wood,

> he entertained ill principles as to religion, spoke often very slightly of the Holy Trinity, kept beastly and atheistical company, of whom Tho. Chaloner the regicide was one.[36]

Wood based his assertion upon Aubrey's note that May was

> A great acquaintance of Tom Chaloner. Would, when *inter pocula,* speake slightingly of the Trinity."[37]

There is nothing beyond this partisan statement to prove May irreligious or atheistic; we can only oppose to it the facts that Wood and Aubrey were both of them Royalists and that Aubrey

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[33] *Commons Journal,* V, 175.
[34] *History of Parliament,* preface, vii. Also *Commons Journal* IV, 410; V, 175.
[35] *Calendar of the Committee for the Advancement of Money* (1642–56), 3 pts. Pt. 1, p. 473.
[36] *Athenae,* III. 810.
[37] *Brief Lives, op. cit.,* II, 56.

was a notably unsafe gatherer of gossip and hearsay. On the other hand, it is observable that there is a distinguishable strain of piety running through all of May's writing, even his plays. The implications of Aubrey's phrase *inter pocula*, on the other hand, are supported somewhat by a letter, dated 26 December, 1650, from Wm. Rowe to Cromwell, in which he discussed the fitness of one Lt. Col. Dolman to perform a special mission to Ireland:

> Sir H. Vane hath had much converse of late with him [Dolman]; I shewed him [Vane] your letter, he was not soe well satisfyed yesterday (as doubting whether he did not clubb it with Tom Chaloner, Tom May (when living) and that gangue. But he is otherwise assured too day, upon inquiry, for it seems he naturally hates potting . . .[38]

The conclusion is, of course, that May, Chaloner, and "that gangue" did not hate "potting;" and since the latter was written by a Parliamentarian who would have no reason for derogating May's character, we must perhaps admit, with regret, that May, like many another good man, had a weakness for the bottle.[39]

In addition to Thomas Chaloner the regicide, the circle of May's friends also included Marchamont Nedham and Henry Marten, to whom the Parliament assigned the task of settling May's affairs after his death. Nedham wavered in his loyalty during the Wars, and little can be said in his defense. His friendship with May, however, probably grew out of the fact that he was the chief author of *Mercurius Britannicus*, to which journal, as we have seen, it is likely that May also contributed. Marten is remembered principally for his plain-speaking as a member of Parliament. He was severe in his condemnation of the Royalists, and equally severe in his criticism of his own party. It is to his credit, perhaps, that Carlyle admired him greatly.[40]

Wood says that May "sided with the presbyterians upon the

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[38] John Nicholls, *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell*. London, 1743; 43.

[39] The writer on May in the *Biographia Britannica* (p. 3069) deprecates the accounts of May's immorality, and points out that they were all made after May's death, and were probably inspired by jealousy.

[40] See *D.N.B.*, articles on Chaloner, Nedham and Marten.

turn of the times."[41] Whether the statement means that May was attached to the Presbyterian faction, or whether Wood used the term "presbyterians" in the more general sense of "Parliamentarians" is not clear. There is no other evidence that May is to be identified with any of the intra-party groups. Some confusion, however, has arisen from the fact that in 1649 a Thomas May was arrested and imprisoned at Weymouth, "for raising false rumours concerning parliament and the general [Cromwell]."[42] Certain writers[43] have identified this Thomas May with the poet; and have concluded that May opposed Cromwell and the Independents and consequently got into trouble after that party's rise to power. Such an assumption is unwarrantable. The Thomas May arrested at Weymouth was not the poet, but one of his numerous connections of the same name. Moreover, May had expressed an admiration for Cromwell as early as 1647;[44] he continued his labors for Parliament up until his death, and he was buried, as we shall see, with full honors. Certainly, even though he were connected with the Presbyterians, May did not attack the Independents, nor was he imprisoned by them.[45]

On July 2, 1650, the Council of State ordered:

> The declaration of the Parliament of England, upon the marching of their army to Scotland, to be sent to Thomas May, to be translated into Latin, that it may be sent into foreign parts.[46]

But this task, May never finished, for he died suddenly on Wednesday, 13 November, 1650. Aubrey[47] declares that May died in his cups; more specifically, that he "came to his death after drinking with his chin tyed with his cap (being fatt); suffocated." This was the scandalous version of his death which

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[41] *Athenae*, III, 810.
[42] Bulstrode Whitelock *Memorials of English Affairs*, 4 v., Oxford, 1853,III 146. Also *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1649–50, pp. 495, 525; 1650, p. 75.
[43] Notably Guizot, *op. cit.*
[44] *History of Parliament*, III, 79ff.
[45] See *D.N.B.* article on May.
[46] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic.* Series 3, II (1650), 228.
[47] *Brief Lives*, II, 56. See also Wood, *Athenae*, III, 811.

May's enemies chose to circulate. Even in death, May was not free from their attacks. In some verses entitled "Tom May's Death," Andrew Marvell writes thus:

As one put drunk into the Packet-boat,
Tom May was hurry'd hence and did not know't.
But was amaz'd on the Elysian side,
And with an eye uncertain, gazing wide,
Could not determine in what place he was,
For whence in Stevens ally Trees or Grass?
Nor where the Popes Head, nor the Mitre lay,
Signs by which still he found and lost his way.
At last while doubtfully he all compares,
He saw near hand, as he imagin'd Ares.
Such did he seem for corpulence and port,
But 'twas a man much of another sort;
'Twas Ben that in the dusky Laurel shade
Amongst the Chorus of old Poets laid,
Sounding of ancient Heroes, such as were
The Subjects Safety, and the Rebel's Fear.
But how a double headed Vulture Eats,
Brutus and Cassius the Peoples cheats.
But seeing May he varied streight his Song,
Gently to signifie that he was wrong.
Cups more than civil of Emathian wine,
I sing (said he) and the Pharsalian Sign,
Where the Historian of the Common-wealth
In his own Bowels sheath'd the conquering health:
By this May to himself and them was come,
He found he was translated, and by whom.
Yet then with foot as stumbling as his tongue
Prest for his place among the Learned throng.
But Ben, who knew not neither foe nor friend,
Sworn enemy to all that do pretend,
Rose more than ever he was seen severe,
Shook his gray locks, and his own Bayes did tear
At this intrusion. Then with Laurel wand,
The awful Sign of his supream command,
At whose dread Whisk Virgil himself does quake,
And Horace patiently its stroke does take,
As he crowds in he whipt him ore the pate

Like Pembroke at the Masque, and then did rate.
Far from these blessed shades tread back agen
Most servil' wit, and Mercenary Pen.
Polydore, Lucan, Allan, Vandale, Goth,
Malignant Poet and Historian both.
Go seek the novice Statesmen, and obtrude
On them some Romane cast similitude,
Tell them of Liberty, the Stories fine,
Until you all grow Consuls in your wine.
Or thou Dictator of the glass bestow
On him the Cato, this the Cicero.
Transferring old Rome hither in your talk,
As Bethlem's House did to Loretta walk.
Foul Architect that hadst not Eye to see
How ill the measures of these states agree.
And who by Romes example England lay,
Those but to Lucan do continue May.
But the nor Ignorance nor seeming good
Misled, but malice fixt and understood.
Because some one than thee more worthy weares
The sacred Laurel, hence are all these teares?
Must therefore all the World be set on flame,
Because a Gazet writer mist his aim?
And for a Tankard-bearing Muse must we
As for the Basket Guelphs and Gibellines be?
When the Sword glitters ore the Judges head,
And fear has Coward Churchmen silenced,
Then is the Poets time, 'tis then he drawes,
And single fights forsaken Vertues cause.
He, when the wheel of Empire, whirleth back,
And though the World's disjointed Axel crack,
Sings still of Ancient Rights and better Times,
Seeks wretched good, arraigns successful Crimes.
But thou base man first prostituted hast
Our spotless knowledge and the studies chast.
Apostatizing from our Arts and us,
To turn the Chronicler to Spartacus.
Yet wast thou taken hence with equal fate,
Before thou couldst great Charles his death relate.
But what will deeper wound thy little mind,
Hast left surviving Davenant still behind

Who laughs to see in this thy death renew'd
Right Romane poverty and gratitude.
Poor Poet thou, and grateful Senate they,
Who thy last Reckoning did so largely pay.
And with the publick gravity would come,
When thou hadst drunk thy last to lead thee home.
If that can be thy home where Spencer lyes
And reverend Chaucer, but their dust does rise
Against thee, and expels thee from their side,
As th' Eagles Plumes from other birds divide.
Nor here thy shade must dwell, Return, Return,
Where Sulphrey Phlegeton does ever burn.
The Cerberus with all his Jawes shall gnash,
Megaera thee with all her Serpents lash.
Thou rivited unto Ixion's wheel
Shalt break, and the perpetual Vulture feel.
'Tis just what Torments Poets ere did feign,
Thou first Historically shouldst sustain.
Thus by irrevocable Sentence cast,
May only master of these Revels past.
And streight he vanisht in a Cloud of pitch,
Such as unto the Sabbath bears the Witch.

It is perhaps sufficient comment on these verses to point out that shortly after writing them, Marvell wrote his celebrated Horatian ode to Cromwell. Marvell's most recent editor explains this discrepancy by contending that Marvell, although he was coming to admire Cromwell in 1650, was still a Royalist; he adds that doubtless Marvell had some reason for a personal dislike of May.[48]

But whatever May's enemies may have said of him, the Parliament appreciated his services on their behalf, and paid him honor as best they could. On 18 November, 1650, the Council of State requested Chaloner to secure and peruse May's papers and to preserve such as might be of use to the State. The Council further commanded

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[48] H. M. Margoliouth (ed.), *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, 2 v., Oxford, 1927; I, 240. The verses are to be found in I, 90–92, of this edition.

Mr. Challoner and Mr. Martin to take care for the interment of Thos. May in a convenient place on the south side of the choir in Westminster Cathedral, and some convenient monument to be set up for him; the whole charge not to exceed £100, which is to be paid by Mr. Frost.

The same gentlemen, with Sir James Harrington, were requested to recommend a suitable person to carry on the writing of the history of Parliament.[49]

With some state, then, May was buried in the south Transept of the Abbey. His tomb was beside that of the historian Camden; and it was marked, according to Aubrey,[50] by a fine monument of white marble. On the tablet was cut the following inscription, composed by Marchamont Nedham:

Quem Anglicana Respub. habuit vindicem, ornamentum Literaria, saecli sui Vatum celeberrimus, deliciae futuri, Lucanus alter plusquam Romanus, Historicus fidus, Equitis aurati filius primogenitus, Thomas Maius h. s. e. Qui paternis titulis claritatis suae specimen usque adeo superaddidit, ut à supremo Angolorum senatu ad annales suos conscribendos fuerit ascitus. Tandem fide intemeratâ Parliamento praestitâ, morte inopinâ noctu correptus diem suum id Nov.

A libertatis (humanae) (M. DC. L.
(Angliae) restitutae (II
Aetatis suae LV.

Hoc in honorem servi tam bene meriti, Parliament.
Reipub. Angl. P. P.[51]

Thus in death Thomas May received greater honor than he had received in his lifetime. But his honors were shortlived. In 1661, Charles II ordered the bodies which had been unwar-

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[49] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic.* Series 3, II (1650), 432. In connection with the third part of this resolution, it is interesting to note that Masson (*Life of Milton*, 6 v., London, 1859–1880, IV, 230) suggests that Milton may have been considered for the post as May's successor. It may be added also, in connection with this settlement of May's affairs, that the *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (ed. J. Venn and J. A. Venn, 4 v., Cambridge, 1922–27; III, 167) is in error in identifying May with the Thomas May of St. Mary Aldermanbury, London, and Roughmere, Sussex, whose will was probated in 1651. The latter belonged to another branch of the family. As far as I have been able to discover, Thomas the poet died intestate—probably because he had no property to bequeath.

[50] *Op. cit.*, II, 57.

[51] Aubrey, II, 57; Wood, III, 811.

rantably interred in "Henry the 7th and other Chappels and places within the Collegiate Church of Westminster since the year 1641, to be forthwith taken up and buried in some place of the churchyard adjoining."[52] Accordingly, May's body (along with those of Pym, Cromwell's mother and sister, and a number of others) was disinterred, and the remains were buried on the green on the north side of the Abbey, between the North Transept and the West End. The stone which had marked his grave was pulled down, and for many years stood upside down in St. Benedict's Chapel.[53] But fate had one more unkindness in store for May. When Davenant, May's ancient rival for the laureateship, died in 1668, he was buried in the same spot where May had been interred eighteen years before.[54] Ironically enough, a stone inscribed "O Rare Sir William Davenant" long marked the original grave of Thomas May.

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[52] J. L. Chester, *The Marriage, Baptismal, and Burial Registers of the Collegiate Church or Abbey of St. Peter, Westminster.* London, 1876; 521–523.

[53] Aubrey, *Brief Lives,* II, 56.

[54] Aubrey, I, 209; Wood, III, 511; Helen M. Pratt, *Westminster Abbey; Its Architecture, History and Monuments,* N. Y., 1914; 172.

IV

Comedies

As a dramatist, Thomas May is chiefly remembered for his plays on classical themes. At the outset of his career, however, he wrote two plays[1] which are worthy of more attention than they have received. The first of these, *The Old Couple*, a curious blending of Fletcherian tragicomedy with the Jonsonian comedy of humors, is baffling to those commentators who prefer to classify their authors in neat and orderly categories. The second play, *The Heir*, is frankly a romantic story, although even here there is a realistic underplot.[2]

It may be well, before we turn to a consideration of the plays themselves, to dispose at once of such necessary matters as dates of composition, performance, and publication. *The Heir* was printed in 1622 and again in 1633; upon the title-pages of both editions occurs the statement that the play was acted in 1620 by the company of the Revels. There is no reason to doubt a specific statement of this nature; accepting it, we may suppose that *The Heir* was acted at the Bull, where in the year 1620 the Revels Company was performing.[3] Presumably, the play was written not long before that date.

The problem of dating *The Old Couple* is much more difficult. There is no record of any performance of this play;[4] and it was not printed until 1658, eight years after its author's death. The play, in the nature of things, must have been written before 1650; and since in the decade before that date May was busy

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[1] Curiously, Philips (*Theatrum Poetarum*, London, 1675, II., 179) and Winstanley (*Lives of the Most Famous English Poets*, London, 1687, p. 164) attributed *Orlando Furioso* and *The Old Wives' Tale* to May, a blunder for which Langbaine (*An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*, London, 1691, 361) fell upon them severely.

[2] Both *The Old Couple* and *The Heir* were reprinted by Dodsley in his *Old English Plays*, and were included in all subsequent editions of that work.

[3] F. G. Fleay, *A Chronicle History of the London Stage*. London, 1890, 307.

[4] Fleay, however, supposes that it was acted, along with *The Heir*, by the Revels Company. *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, 2 vols., London, 1891, II, 84.

with his Parliamentary writings, and since, moreover, it was intended for the stage (as is shown by the concluding speech to the pit and the general nature of the story), it must have been written before the closing of the theatres. The question is, How long before? Two bits of evidence suggest that the play was written in the late 30's. A lyric in Act III—

> Dear, do not your fair beauty wrong
> In thinking still you are too young.
> The rose and lilies in your cheek
> Flourish, and no more ripeness seek;
> Your cherry lip, red, soft and sweet,
> Proclaims such fruit for taste most meet:
> Then lose no time, for love has wings
> And flies away from aged things.—

is a palpable imitation of Herrick's celebrated "Gather Ye Rosebuds,"[5] which first appeared in print in *The Hesperides*. Also, two lines in the third act of May's play—

> Gently my joys distill
> Lest you do break the vessel you should fill—

are identical with the concluding lines of Suckling's comedy *The Goblins*, acted in 1638 and published in 1646. Since Suckling's play appeared in print long before May's, it would seem at first glance that May had borrowed the lines from his more distinguished contemporary.

On the other hand, it seems incredible that May, having given up dramatic writing about the time of the accession of Charles I, should have resumed that form of literary activity a decade or more later, when his connections with the theatre were slight and when he was coming more and more into sym-

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[5] It is no more than fair to May to note that this plagiarism was intended to be obvious, and that in the play it evokes the comment, "Never man stole with so little judgment." Curiously enough, May's imitation of Herrrick enjoyed a considerable popularity in its day; it appeared in numerous anthologies of the time. See Norman Ault, *Seventeenth Century Lyrics*, London, 1928, 476, and the subsequent bibliography.

pathy with the Puritan party. Moreover, several facts suggest that the play was written in the author's youth. In the first place, there is in it a large element of romanticism, a quality which becomes more and more submerged in May's later writings. In the second place, it shows a lack of familiarity with the exigencies of the theatre. Moreover, one of its themes has to do with lost fortunes,—a subject which may reasonably be supposed to have engaged May's attention shortly after the loss of his own estates. Finally, it contains a passage—

> The time has been,
> In such a solitary place as this,
> I should have trembled at each moving leaf;
> But sorrow, and my miserable state
> Have made me bold.—

which closely parallels a similar passage in *The Heir*,[6] a fact which suggests that the two plays may have been composed at no great interval of time.

To suppose an early date for *The Old Couple* is not entirely to disregard the parallels with Herrick and Suckling mentioned above. The exact date of Herrick's poem is not certain; it was possibly written during the Bohemian youth of the future vicar of Dean Prior, and May, like Herrick a member of Jonson's circle, may have heard it recited at the Mermaid or the Devil Tavern. As far as the parallel with Suckling is concerned, it is conceivable, though not a matter of record, that *The Old Couple* was performed in the theatres and was therefore familiar to Suckling; or that the latter had read the play in manuscript, even though it was not performed. The hypothesis that the Cavalier poet borrowed from May is supported by the fact that the lines are not particularly appropriate to the situation in Suckling's play, and that their regular iambics, coming at the end of the uneven lines of *The Goblins*, have an air of having been tacked on arbitrarily.[7] Even admitting, however, that

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[6] See *The Old Couple*, II, iii (Dodsley's *Old English Plays*, 4th ed., 1875. XII, 32–33) and *The Heir*, III, ii (*ibid.*, XI, 549).

[7] This, in general, is the view of Fleay. See his *Biographical Chronicle*, II, 84.

the lines were borrowed by May, it is possible, as one critic has suggested,[8] that they were a later addition, made, perhaps, at some time when May thought of putting the play into print. Certainly, in the light of the general qualities of the play, it seems necessary that we regard *The Old Couple* as an early composition, written about the same time as *The Heir*. As a matter of fact, the date 1619 for the composition of *The Old Couple* is accepted by most modern authorities.[9]

To explain the nature of these early plays of May's one must keep in mind the condition of the English stage at the time when May began to write. Towards the end of the second decade of of the century, there had come a lull in the tremendous creative activity which had marked the high noon of the drama in the reign of the great queen and in the early years of her successor. Of the great dramatists of the early period, Fletcher, Middleton, and Dekker still survived to write for the stage; but with the exception of Fletcher, their best work lay in the past. Middleton and Dekker had turned aside from the realistic portrayal of London life and were respectively writing tragedies and tragicomedies, the one in collaboration with Rowley, the other with Day and John Ford. The younger men who in the reign of Charles would carry on the great traditions of the drama had not yet distinguished themselves. Ford himself had not begun to write those plays whose moral unsoundness has made them synonymous with the decadence; Massinger was still an apprentice to Fletcher; Shirley had not yet written the first of the plays which were to earn for him the designation "last of the great race." Of the minor playwrights of the period, practically all were content to imitate either Fletcher, dominant at this moment, as before and after, on the popular stage; or Jonson, whose comedy of humors, even after its author had temporarily eschewed the drama, remained a potent influence in the theatre as late as the time of Davenant.[10]

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[8] See Collier's note to Dodsley, *op. cit.*, XII, 3.

[9] See Fleay, *Biographical Chronicle*, II, 84; and F. E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, 2 vols., Boston and New York, 1908, II, 594.

[10] See Mina Kerr, *Influence of Ben Jonson on English Comedy*, University of Pennsylvania Monograph, 1912.

Thomas May fell under the influence of both these men. "Sealed of the tribe of Ben" in nightly gatherings at "the Sun, the Dog, the Triple Tun," he could not well have escaped the influence of Jonson's personality and of his theories of art. But between Jonson and May there was one important temperamental difference. Whereas the older man was a scholar and a satiric realist, May was a scholar and a romanticist. He belonged in part, by birth and training, to the courtly tradition; cheek by jowl with the classical learning, there existed in his mind a persistent romanticism, nourished certainly by his reading of Shakespeare and Fletcher, which, despite the influence of Jonson, colored all his dramatic writings, even to his Roman tragedies. He was equipped by nature, therefore, for successful imitation of only one phase of Jonson's many-sided classicism—that phase which took the form of archeological zeal and which is (if to say so be not adding further confusion to two much-confused terms) in itself a kind of romanticism. That other side of Jonson's classicism which expressed itself in a realistic portrayal of contemporary life and in the bias of satire, May could not compass. His romanticism, coupled with the scholar's not infrequent distaste for looking at life directly, left him ill-equipped to participate in a realistic movement. Consequently, when he essayed to imitate the Jonsonian comedy of humors, he departed, under the pull of his romanticism and the ascendency of Fletcher in the theatre, from what seems to have been his original intention; and produced tragicomedies in which, although the Jonsonian characteristics are present, the dominant tone is the romanticism of Shakespeare and his "royal" successor.

These two currents were clearly crossing in May's mind when he wrote *The Old Couple*. The title of the play, and its evident moral intention, indicate that it was originally designed as a satiric and realistic comedy of humors. A glimpse at the *dramatis personae*, however, gives us pause in our classification: characters named Eugeny and Euphues and Matilda and Artemia mingle freely with Earthworm, Freeman, Fruitful, Dotterel, Trusty, Sir Argent Scrape, Lady Whimsey, and Lady Covet. The setting, too, is more than partially romantic: although it is said to be London, it might just as well, in its lack of par-

ticularization, be Sicily; and when the desolate lover takes refuge in caves and "within the covert of a shady wood," we feel that the place is not very different from the forest of Arden or the seacoast of Bohemia. Finally, with respect to the action of the play, Jonsonian and Fletcherian elements are held closely in solution. Scenes which involve separated lovers and their ultimate reunion in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles alternate with scenes concerning "humorous" oldsters, foolish gulls, designing females; in the end, the apparently tragic tangle of the plot is unraveled by a revelation as violently unnatural as that of *The Winter's Tale* or *King and No King*. Laying aside the play, we are not sure whether we have been reading tragicomedy or comedy of humors. Certainly we must conclude, if in this play May was a son of Ben, he was also a nephew, or at least a godson, of Fletcher.

In its plot, *The Old Couple* is the most original of May's plays. Although certain characters and episodes suggest a knowledge on the author's part of a long succession of earlier plays, there is, as far as we know, no single source to which May went for his material.[11] This fact, and the contrasting elements mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, may best be indicated by a summary:

Eugeny, supposed to have murdered one Scudmore, has fled for his life to the depth of a forest. Here he mourns his separation from his beloved Artemia, with whom he communicates through the friendly office of Theodore. His woe is increased when he learns from Theodore of the intended marriage of his uncle, Sir Argent Scrape, aged "fourscore fifteen," to Lady Covet, aged "fourscore". Among the world of fashion the approaching nuptuals of this precious pair have caused much witty, not to say ribald, comment; but to Eugeny it is not a matter for jest. His estate is entailed to Sir Argent as next of kin; and the latter, realizing that Eugeny's death will augment

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[11] No source is mentioned by Langbaine in either his *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* or his *Momus Triumphans or the Plagiaries of the English Stage;* nor has one been found by later commentators. My own search of earlier plays and of the available Spanish and French source-material has revealed nothing.

his own fortune, and blinded by his avarice to both kinship and ordinary humane feeling, is plotting to procure Eugeny's arrest and execution.

As plans for the wedding go forward, it is revealed that of this aged pair not only Sir Argent is guilty of overweening cupidity. Lady Covet has fleeced her nephew Scudmore (supposed to have been murdered, it will be recalled, by Eugeny) of a wealthy manor; and the two ancient conspirators, their wheel-chairs pulled close together, discuss frankly their cleverness in thus augmenting their fortunes at the expense of their young relations. But the marriage of these fortunes is to have its impediments. Lady Covet's principal advisor is her chaplain Fruitful, really Scudmore in disguise, for Eugeny's victim has miraculously recovered.[12] Shortly after the marriage with Sir Argent has been arranged, Fruitful persuades the ancient dame that after marriage she will lose all control of her fortune; at his instigation, consequently, she makes over her estate to certain feofees who will administer it for her. Once the articles are signed, Fruitful tells Sir Argent of his fiancée's perfidy; the knight, towering with rage at thus being cheated of the fortune he expected to marry, confronts the lady with her iniquity and on the day before the wedding breaks the engagement. When Lady Covet, as a result of this development, tries to regain her fortune, she learns that the feofees will not return her estate. She is, of course, overwhelmed with grief; realizes the ruin which her cupidity was wreaked upon her; and even goes so far, when Sir Argent calls to make his adieus, as to preach that worthy a sermon on the sin of avarice.

Meanwhile, Sir Argent's spies having been successful in ferreting out his nephew's hiding place, Eugeny is arrested for the murder of Scudmore. Charged by Eugeny with responsibility for his arrest, Sir Argent is finally remorseful at his misdoings, but there is apparently no way in which Eugeny's life may be spared. But at this point, fortunately, when the scornful fingers of the whole assemblage are pointed at Sir

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[12] I must confess to giving away the secret of the plot at this point. In the action of the play, Fruitful's identity is concealed until the end.

Argent, Fruitful appears on the scene and returns to Lady Covet all her property except the manor which is rightfully Scudmore's. He then reveals himself as Scudmore, who, in some way not explained, has been saved miraculously from death. Eugeny, of course, is automatically pardoned, and in turn freely pardons Sir Argent. Eugeny is united with his Artemia, Scudmore with his love Matilda, who has mourned him as dead; and in a general atmosphere of love and forgiveness the play closes.

In addition to this main plot, *The Old Couple* has several sub-plots which are related only remotely to the principal theme. One of these tells how Eugeny's friend Theodore cures his father, the universally hated Earthworm, of miserliness. After giving his father a strong sleeping potion, Theodore, supposedly at Earthworm's request, dispenses rich gifts to the poor of the neighborhood. Later, as Earthworm wakes from his long sleep, a fire breaks out on his property. The neighbors, mindful of the recent donations, assist willingly in extinguishing the blaze. Earthworm is so touched by this apparent return of good for evil that he forthwith reforms and becomes not only a confirmed philanthropist but an important mouthpiece in the cause of righteousness. Less moral, but more amusing, are the episodes which concern Dotterel and Lady Whimsey. The former, a wealthy gull who wishes to be loved for his merits alone, is married for his money by Lady Whimsey, who is aided and abetted in her pursuit of the gull by one Barnet. The latter has lost his estate through the craftiness of Dotterel's father, and expects a large commission from Lady Whimsey if he effects a marriage.

Although, as has been pointed out, *The Old Couple* contains a large admixture of romantic elements, the foregoing synopsis indicates clearly the underlying ethical intent of the play. Langbaine was of the opinion that it was "design'd chiefly as an antidote against covetousness."[13] Not *chiefly*, we may reply, but *originally*. As has been suggested, the moral and satirical side of the play was submerged in the romantic. This was partly due to the fact that May lacked the satiric bias, which

[13] *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*, London, 1691; 364.

in its intention is always corrective. The failure of May's satire is nowhere more clearly revealed than in his handling of characters. The caricature is never strong enough to make us feel contempt for Sir Argent Scrape or Lady Covet or Dotterel; we feel for them instead merely a kind of curiosity, such as we might feel for a strange fish in an aquarium. Moreover, May's moral indignation at these people is seldom sustained: when Earthworm advises his son to live simply and save money, the miser at times forgets the major premise of his argument, and seems merely to be advocating a return to a pastoral and romantic simplicity of life. On the whole, it may be concluded, *The Old Couple* is an inefficacious "antidote against covetousness."

Turning now to a consideration of the play as a drama, we observe at once several weaknesses in the plot. Of these, the least important are those at which several critics have caviled —namely, Earthworm's sudden conversion to philanthropy and Scudmore's surprising return. Concerning the first of these, it may be pointed out that the miser's change of heart is foreshadowed at the beginning of the play, and that, although his remorse may be unnatural, it is not unexpected. As for the second, any reader of the old drama is familiar with a hundred such endings; they were standardized furniture of the romantic tragicomedy to which in some respects May's play conforms. When Scudmore removes his disguise and then avoids a tedious explanation by saying,

> To tell you by what means
> I was most strangely cur'd, and found a way
> How to conceal my life, will be too long
> Now to discourse of here; I will anon
> Relate at large . . .

he is affording us more explanation than did Paulina when she presented Hermione to Leontes' startled gaze, and is placing less strain upon our credulity than Arane, in *A King and No King*. To object to such improbabilities as these is to object to the whole genre of tragicomedy, in which generations of playgoers took delight.

More important are those defects which indicate May's youthful ineptitude in dramatic composition. One of these is the unfinished or indeterminate nature of the sub-plots. Indeed, there is one sub-plot so fragmentary that it has not been mentioned in the synopsis. Eugeny and Theodore, talking in the former's woodland retreat, hear a woman's voice upraised in melodious but plaintive song. Investigation reveals this woodland songstress to be Matilda, mourning for her lost Scudmore. Theodore is forthwith smitten with love for her; but why he should be made to suffer thus is not explained, for May drops the episode thus begun, and at the end Theodore joins in the general rejoicing at the happy reunion of Scudmore and Matilda. More fully developed are the almost allegorical story of Earthworm, and the amusing account of Lady Whimsey's gathering in of Dotterel. But the former is so brief that its entire omission would not materially shorten the play; and the latter is fragmentary and lacking in what scenarists of today call "continuity." Moreover, neither of these sub-plots bears any close relation to the main-plot. The Earthworm episode, perhaps, might be justified artistically as the text or the primary *motif* of the play; and it is possible to regard the Whimsey-Dotterel scenes as the comic-counterpart of the main plot. Actually, however, neither sub-plot does more than furnish spectators and commentators for the main action. This weakness, however, in no way impairs their interest; it is worth while pointing out merely in so far as it reveals the distance of *The Old Couple* from the well-made play, and in that it exhibits a surprising characteristic in this early drama of a writer whose classical training might well have impressed upon his plays the severity of the Greek unities.

Despite these weaknesses, however, the story as a whole is entertaining in its ingenuity. With respect to the action, we are not moved to pity Eugeny in his unhappy plight, chiefly because we know that somehow his life and fortune will be spared. In spite of this lack of suspense, however, the play is interesting in its parts, and moves with an engaging rapidity. The dialogue, particularly the speeches of Euphues, Barnet, and Lady Whimsey, is natural, and frequently witty. The characters, too, although

they fall short of the intended caricature, are clearly differentiated. Scudmore, Eugeny, and Theodore, to be sure, are but the lay figures of romance; but there is no confusing the niggardly Earthworm with the more enterprisingly avaricious Sir Argent, or the crafty Lady Covet with the frank and boisterious Lady Whimsey. The latter, with her obvious descent from the Wife of Bath, is the most memorable person in the play. Such characters as these, and the genuine interest of the story, make *The Old Couple* a play worthy the attention of the student of our older drama.

More regularly constructed, but less entertaining and original, than *The Old Couple*, is May's other non-tragic drama, *The Heir*. This play, although it has a realistic underplot, is avowedly a romantic tragicomedy. To be sure, it begins with a passage in which we are led to believe that the "humor" greed is to dominate the action, but it changes its tone with the second scene, and never thereafter reverts to the original theme. *Volpone*, which perhaps furnishes a hint for the miserly father, is forgotten; the author leads us into an atmosphere of moonlit gardens and terrorful forests, of star-crossed lovers, of dire plottings for revenge, of disguises and surprising revelations of identity, of forgiveness and love triumphant. Even the complexities of the sub-plot, which on the whole preserves the note of Jonsonian realism, are resolved by means of romantic revelations in terms of piracy and shipwreck.

In devising the plot for *The Heir*, May apparently used no single source. Instead, following a practice not uncommon among playwrights of the period, he garnered a number of tried and true situations from earlier plays. The central situation——a father pretending that his son is dead in order that his daughter may be supposed an heiress and thus attract wealthy suitors—is on the whole original. The false report of death is common enough, and may have been suggested by any of a number of plays, of which, in view of the nature of the characters, *Volpone* is not the least probable; but the purpose for which the report is used is, as far as I know, original with May. To the working out of the theme, a number of analogues might be suggested. The daughter, disguised as a page, eloping with her

young lover in order to escape a distasteful marriage suggests an imitation not only of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, but also of scores of plays in which the same situation occurs. The solution of the problem by the return of a person supposedly dead is again one of the standard devices of tragicomedy. A closer parallel to the whole plot of *The Heir* is to be found in the eighth novel of Barnabe Riche's *Farewell to the Military Profession*, which served as the source for the anonymous play *Philotus*, c. 1600. Here, although the elaboration of the story varies greatly from that in May's play, there are several points of resemblance to *The Heir:* a father contracts a marriage for his daughter with an old man whom she abhors; disguised as a boy, and with the help of her lover, the girl escapes from her father's house; the situation is saved by the return of a long absent brother. Even here, however, the relation to *The Heir* is extremely tenuous. We must conclude, I think, that May, far from using any single play as his model, merely worked over the themes familiar through constant repetition to every Elizabethan play-goer.

Upon this central theme, however, May engrafted, not always with due regard for suitability, several elements taken directly and unmistakably from Shakespeare. In the interest of conserving both time and space, these may be set down categorically:

1. From *Romeo and Juliet*, the situation in which a young man and a young woman fall in love at first sight,[14] only to learn that they are the children of rival houses and that their parents will oppose a marriage between them.

2. From *Measure for Measure*, the situation in which an official offers to pardon a criminal on condition that the young woman who is pleading for the culprit's life will become his (the official's) mistress.

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[14] Emil Koeppel ("Studien uber Shakespeare's Wirkung auf Zeitgenossische Dramatiker," *Materialien zur Kunde des alteren englischen Dramas*, IX. Louvain, 1905; 81–82) suggests the influence here of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. It seems unnecessary that we should go so far into the past in search of the source of May's inspiration.

3. From *Much Ado About Nothing*, a constable and watch much given to malapropisms.[15]

4. From *A Comedy of Errors*, the situation in which two brothers, separated by shipwreck in infancy, are reunited. Although this is common material, the conjunction in *The Heir* of shipwreck and the place Syracuse suggests that May had Shakespeare's earliest comedy in mind.

A resumé of the plot of *The Heir* may serve to clarify some of the points made in the preceding paragraphs, and to indicate to the reader the way in which May combined the numerous elements of his story:

Polymetes, a wealthy Syracusan, abetted by his servant Roscio, has caused to be circulated a false report of his son's death in a distant country. The son, Eugenio, is traveling abroad; and before his return, Polymetes hopes, a wealthy suitor will seek the hand of Leucothoe, Eugenio's sister and now the supposed heiress to her father's fortune. The bait is attractive to Virro, an "old Count;" so large is the latter's fortune that Polymetes, drying the tears shed over his son's death, readily consents to the match. Meanwhile, however, Leucothoe has fallen in love with Philocles, the son of Euphues, Polymete's bitter enemy: although the two young people have never met, Philocles has seen Leucothoe walking in her garden, and the damsel has beheld the young lord riding grandly about the city; an exchange of letters, effected by Psectas, Leucothoe's maid, has revealed their mutual love.

In face of this sudden passion, Leucothoe of course rejects the proposals of the antique Virro; and Polymetes, surprised at his daughter's stubborn refusal to accept this splendid match,

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[15] The following exordium of the constable's speech to the watch will sufficiently indicate the closeness of this parallel: "Well, I must show now that you have to do, for I myself, before I came to this prefermity, was as simple as one of you: and for your better destruction, I will deride my speech into two parts." (Act IV, Sc. iii, p. 569 in Dodsley, Vol. XI, 4th ed.)

This, and the foregoing parallels to Shakespeare, are pointed out by Koeppel, *op. cit.*, and by Hans Strube, *S. Centlivre's "The Stolen Heires" und sein Verhaltniss zu "The Heir" von Thomas May. Nebst Anhang: May und Shakespeare.* Halle Dissertation, 1900, 46–51.

sets his man to discover the cause. While master and man are thus scheming, there is ushered in one Irus, a poor scholar (really Eugenio in disguise, as reader and audience know from the moment of the young man's appearance) who tells Polymetes that Eugenio is not dead, as has been reported. The father, not unnaturally more chagrined than delighted at this supposed news, astonishes Irus by begging him to keep silence. Less astonished when he hears of the match proposed for his sister, Irus (really Eugenio) resolves to continue in disguise and await events.

Shortly afterwards, having learned, through the perfidy of Psectas the maid, that Leucothoe loves the son of the hated Euphues, Polymetes overhears the young lovers, who know their parents will never consent to a marriage, planning an elopement. In this plan Polymetes sees an opportunity both to remove an unwelcome suitor and to strike a blow at his old enemy Euphues; for he knows that he can invoke against Philocles a statute of the realm which makes it a capital offense to marry an heiress without her father's consent. Eugenio, however, still disguised as Irus, has also learned, and approved, of his sister's love affair. Accordingly, in order to eliminate old Virro as a suitor, he tells the latter that the rightful heir still lives. Instead of withdrawing his suit, however, Virro engages the supposed scholar to murder Eugenio—himself! Rather than reveal his identity at this point, the young man agrees to perform the murder.

When, at the appointed hour, Leucothoe, attired as a page, keeps her tryst with Philocles, the elopement of the lovers is interrupted by the arrival of Polymetes, Roscio, Irus, and certain arms of the law. The arrest of Philocles follows; and the whole party, with the exception of Leucothoe, who is left in the care of her disguised brother, betakes itself to the court. At court, in the presence of the king, occurs a stirring debate between Polymetes and Euphues, with the life of Philocles as the issue. Polymetes, inspired as much by his hatred toward Euphues as by his outraged parenthood, demands the penalty of death prescribed by law; Euphues, protesting his known loyalty to the king and arguing also that the elopement has not actually taken place, pleads passionately for his son's life.

While they are thus debating, Leucothoe, having been released by her guard, bursts into the royal presence. She begs tearfully that her lover's life may be spared. The king, overwhelmed by her beauty, orders the others from the room, and then proposes to Leucothoe that she become his mistress, for which favor he will spare Philocles. When Leucothoe, Isabella-like, refuses indignantly, the king swears he will not pardon her lover. Once he has made the resolve, however, the king experiences an astonishingly sudden change of heart, and is much distressed to learn from his most subtle lawyer that there is no way in which the plain consequences of the law can be evaded.

When all this tangle is reported to Eugenio, still disguised as Irus, he resolves, by the simple revelation of his identity, to save the life of Philocles, remove Virro as a suitor to Leucothoe, and unite the unhappy lovers. Accordingly, he permits himself to be overheard, by a constable and watch, bemoaning his crime in murdering Eugenio. He is haled into court at the precise moment when Philocles is to be sentenced; after hearing the supposed Irus's confession that he has murdered Eugenio at the instigation of Virro, the court sentences Irus and Virro to die along with Philocles. Polymetes is overcome with grief at the way in which his plot has resulted in what he now supposes to be the real death of his son. At sight of his father's tears, Irus reveals his true identity as Eugenio: since Eugenio lives, Virro has not been guilty of instigating a murder; since the male heir lives, Philocles has not been guilty of stealing an heiress. All are pardoned; Polymetes and Euphues repent their former hatred and are reconciled; Philocles and Leucothoe plight their troth; Eugenio sues successfully for the hand of Euphues' niece. All is well.[16]

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[16] *The Heir*, in its main plot, was "improved" for the Restoration Stage by Mrs. Susannah Centlivre, under the title *The Stolen Heiress, or the Salamanca Doctor Outplotted*. Apart from the altering of May's verse into miserable prose, the changes are not large: the Governor (the King of May's play) pleads with Lucasia (May's Leucothoe) not in his own behalf, but on behalf of his nephew; in the sub-plot, the unwelcome suitor is made a foolish scholar. Genest (*History of the English Stage*, II, 264) says that "Mrs. Carroll's [Centlivre's] whole play is wretchedly inferior to May's, particularly in point of language; the alterations which she has made in the plot are not very material, but they are all for the worse." A carefully charted comparison of the two plays forms the subject of a German dissertation. See above, p. 88, note.

Joined to this story is a sub-plot which in its central idea closely parallels the main theme of the play. Franklin has betrothed his daughter Luce to Shallow, "an old foolish gentleman." Luce, however, loves Francisco, whose poverty makes him ineligible, in Franklin's eyes, as a suitor. In order to avoid the distasteful marriage with Shallow, Luce pretends that she is about to have a child by Francisco;[17] her father, however, far from forcing a marriage with the young man, so gulls Shallow that the latter acknowledges paternity and agrees to marry Luce at once. But the marriage, happily, is prevented through the timely intervention of a Sumner. Meanwhile, Francisco meets an old sailor, Alphonso, who reveals the fact that the young man is not a penniless nobody, but really a son of Lord Euphues, separated in infancy from his father through piracy and shipwreck. Resolved, as a consequence of this news, to marry Luce at once, Francisco disguises himself as a parson, disposes of Shallow by various ruses, and is joined to Luce in matrimony by an authentic priest. Franklin is indignant, of course, especially when it is disclosed that Luce's approaching maternity has been merely pretended; but his wrath is appeased when he learns Francisco's true identity.[18]

Basing his judgment solely upon this retelling of the story, the reader may conclude that *The Heir* is merely an olla-podrida of heterogeneous elements, and that—to change the figure—May failed to weave his threads into a consistent pattern. Such a criticism, however, is scarcely just. With the exception of the sudden and illicit passion of the king for Leucothoe and his equally sudden repentance, and with the possible exception of the fact that Polymetes' motive shifts from greed to revenge, the elements of the play have been moulded into a pleasing unit. It

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[17] The reader, however, does not know that Luce's maternity is all a pretense until the end of the play. A stage direction indicates that Luce's condition was represented realistically on the stage. Creizenach (*English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, Philadelphia and London, 1916; 404) cites numerous instances—among them Marianna in *Measure for Measure* and Helena at the close of *All's Well*—to prove that such representation was common in the Elizabethan theatre.

[18] The coarseness of this sub-plot was attractive, apparently, to Richard Brome, who imitated it exactly in his *Sparagus Garden* (acted 1635, printed 1640).

may be objected that the sub-plot, which touches the main story only at the conclusion, is incompetently handled; on the other hand, the story of Francisco and Luce is an exact, if somewhat coarse, parallel of the story of Philocles and Leucothoe, a not inartistic reflection, in the mirror of a lower society, of the impulses which dominate the supposedly superior group. A more legitimate objection to the drama is its failure to keep the reader puzzled as to the solution. Curiously enough, a contemporary of May's praised *The Heir* for this very quality of suspense which it lacked. In commendatory verses prefixed to the printed play, Carew wrote in part:

> The whole plot doth alike itself disclose
> Through the five acts, as doth a lock, that goes
> With letters; for, till every one be known,
> The lock's as fast as if you had found none.

It is difficult to explain this praise except in terms of friendship and perhaps literary log-rolling. Certainly the "lock" is not fast for long; Eugenio reveals his identity in his first soliloquy; thereafter, not "how," but "when," is the question we ask ourselves concerning the solution. Indeed, there is considerable irrationality in Eugenio's postponement of his revelation; and in the fact that at the last moment he alone experiences difficulty in attaining access to the king, and must be arrested in order to get into the royal presence.

Although these are definite weaknesses in the story, the play is interesting in a number of ways. To be sure, the characters with the exception of Polymetes and Leucothoe have little reality; they are, for the most part, the stillborn descendants of generations of romantic ancestors. But that this criticism is less significant than might first appear is obvious if one asks oneself where, except in the greatest dramas, the characters of the Jacobean playwrights are not conventionalized.[19] The action of the story, however, frequently achieves real emotional intensity. The love-duet in the garden between Philocles and

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[19] For support of this opinion, see F. E. Schelling, *op. cit.*, II, 200.

Leucothoe is well sustained, and has an unmistakeable note of beauty and tender pathos. So, too, the speech in which Leucothoe pleads with her father to save Philocles' life is another of the moments when the play rises to power and at least to the lower levels of poetry. The narrative is pleasing also in its rapidity; indeed, a legitimate complaint is that the scenes are too short and too rapid to be entirely suitable for the stage. The dialogue is restrained and natural; there is none of the bombast which sometimes crept into the writing of May's contemporary dramatists, and none of the long-windedness which came to characterize the dialogue of later romantic playwrights. *The Heir*, considered in these details as well as in its larger aspects, is an extremely readable play.

A word concerning the language of these plays may not be amiss. Both *The Old Couple* and *The Heir* are written in competent blank verse, the former from beginning to end, the latter with a few prose interpolations. May's blank verse is notable for two qualities: first, an almost monotonous regularity in the iambics (a sound classicist, May is never guilty of false quantities); second, a freedom in the use of the pause which gives a verisimilitude of natural speech to the dialogue. A few lines will illustrate these points:

> He goes in black: they say he is a scholar:
> Has been beyond sea, too: there it may lie:
> And he must satisfy her longing thought,
> What or how many husbands she shall have;
> Of what degree; upon what night she shall
> Dream of the man; when she shall fast, and walk
> In the churchyard, to see him passing by,
> Just in those clothes that first becomes a suitor.[20]

In this verse, May seldom rises to the height of imaginative poetry; he uses comparatively few images, none of them especially striking or daring. On the other hand, he manages his verse with dramatic appropriateness and sustained rhetorical effectiveness. One other quality of May's language is worthy of mention

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[20] From *The Old Couple*, I, ii. Dodsley (4th ed. 1875), XII, 21–22.

—its freedom from the coarseness which so often characterized the older dramas and which must have been, in many cases, a concession to the lowest level of popular taste. This variety of unpleasantness has no place in May's writing.[21]

Enough has been said of the individual qualities of *The Old Couple* and *The Heir* to make the mutual characteristics of these plays apparent. Their chief interest, it seems unnecessary to repeat, lies in the fact that both of them derive from the types of drama made popular by Jonson and Fletcher. In drawing upon these two sources of inspiration, May merely followed the example of his fellow dramatists. None of the playwrights of his day escaped entirely the influence of one or the other of Shakespeare's two chief contemporaries; few escaped being influenced by both at the same time. In few other dramatists, however, do both forces work so nearly simultaneously; in no other play than *The Old Couple* are the two elements held so closely in solution. In one important respect, however, May differed from both Fletcher and Jonson. His "philosophy of life," as revealed in his plays, is one of moral sanity, of faith in the goodness of the race. Consequently, except for a brief moment in *The Heir*, we do not find his mind playing with the theme of inordinate and illicit lust with which Fletcher was so frequently preoccupied. Nor is there in May the conviction of man's complete unregeneracy which furnished Jonson with material for unlimited satire. May's wicked people—Earthworm and Lady Covet and Sir Argent Scrape in *The Old Couple*, Polymetes and the King in *The Heir*—all come to sincere repentance in the end. They return, as it were, from the miasmic swamp of evil in which they have lost their way to their natural world of light and virtue. And those whom they have injured forgive them willingly. In the view of a modern behaviorist, perhaps, this universal piety argues little for May's knowledge of men and women; it argues much, however, for his goodness.

These comedies of May's have in them few of the qualities which make for great drama. The characters do not engrave

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[21] This fact seems worth noting in view of the charges brought against him later by his political enemies. See above, p. 69.

themselves upon the reader's mind; the plots are not very striking nor the involved emotions profoundly stirring; the poetry achieves no Parnassian heights. On the other hand, these plays considered as a whole are better than any of their parts. There is a high level of general merit, a sustained interest. Although there are few passages that one might want to quote, there are no passages which, if quoted, would stigmatize their author as an incompetent dramatist. If *The Heir* and *The Old Couple* are neither excellent nor distinguished, they at least achieve something better than the dead level of mediocrity.

V

Tragedies

After writing, about 1620, the two comedies discussed in the preceding chapter, May temporarily discontinued his writing for the theatres. What activity engaged his attention during the next few years we do not know; possibly he had already begun the work of translation which was later to establish his reputation among his contemporaries. However that may be, he returned to dramatic writing about the year 1626, perhaps in the hope that he could still extract a profitable livelihood from the precarious business of the theatre. In this new venture, however, he forsook comedy entirely and devoted himself to writing those classical tragedies which are his chief claim to remembrance as a dramatist. Without any wish to become lost in a nebulous discussion of the psychological qualities of May's mind, we may nevertheless suggest that our author was more happily equipped by nature for the writing of tragedy than for the composition of popular comedy. As we have seen, he lacked the gift of looking at life directly which was necessary for successful achievement in realistic or satiric comedy; and he had not, despite his two imitations of Fletcherian drama, the kind of imagination required for writing salty romantic tragicomedy of the sort which Fletcher had taught Jacobean audiences, groundlings and courtiers alike, to admire. For, as was pointed out in the last chapter, his tragicomedies have in them a moral earnestness which sometimes gained control of the story, and which was little calculated to amuse the theatre-goers of the day. It is not surprising, therefore, that such a man should forsake comedy for tragedy. Nor is it surprising that his tragedies have in them none of the febrile questioning of the accepted moral code which characterized such later dramatists as Ford, but are instead grounded on an idealized morality which derives both from Ben Jonson and from the ancients.

Whatever theory May himself held concerning the nature and function of tragedy was expressed in the dedicatory epistle

prefixed to his *Tragedy of Antigone.* Although this brief essay on tragedy is obviously based upon a reading of medieval and Renaissance critics as well as upon his knowledge of classical theorizing, it may be given here as typical of what a Jacobean scholar-dramatist thought he was about. Addressing himself to "the most worthily honoured" Endymion Porter, May wrote in part:

This tragedy of *Antigone* may perchance (considering the subject of it) be thought a poem too sad and baleful to be read with pleasure, or presented with delight upon any stage. I confess the sadness of it; but if it suffer for that, it will raise a question more general: why tragedies have at any time been allowed? Why the ruins and calamities of some men have been represented as a delightsome pastime to other men? Why those ancient wits, whom Greece in her learned'st times did highly admire, have chosen for their deathlesse poems almost no other arguments than those calamitous stories of Thebes, Mycenae, Troy, and, most of all, this very discourse of the fatal and incestuous family of Oedipus? where all the passages are so far (a man would think) from delighting men, that they might move a suffering even in the furies themselves? and why the greatest princes, both Graecian and Roman, in their highest jollity have not only beheld with delight the presentation of them: but for their own exercise (as many of them as have had the itch of writing) have chosen these arguments, and made them into tragedies? Why this hath been generally so (though the cause need no apology, at least not mine) I will venture some few conjectures. All the spectatours are either wretched or fortunate; the wretched in sad stories are in some sort eased by fellowship in woe, or delighted in tragical expressions, as being somewhat of kindred with their own thoughts; those that are fortunate are affected, in such shows, either with delight, or wholesome sorrow; if they be delighted, it is in the taste of their own prosperity, which appears greater, set off by an object of such contrariety; and this delight is not out of malice (as pleased with the woes of others) but acknowledgement to those high powers which make the difference; if they be sorrowful, their sorrow is wholesome; for as in melancholy diseases merry tales are used to assist nature, so in too great a joy and wantonness of the soul, such sad representations are as a good allay, depressing the levity of their thoughts to such a mean, as is fit to entertaine the best contemplations. Moreover tragedies (beside the state of them) are pleasing in the expression, for as much as sadness doth usually afford the best strains of writing: to omit other instances, love itself (the usual argument of our new comedy) is there best written, where it is most distressed, and in despairing passion; that part of the comedy seeming best, which is nearest

tragedy. In that strain also go most, or the best of love-sonnets that now are made. But I wander too far in this theme . . .[1]

Since May was writing for the popular stage and therefore was at least partly concerned with merely entertaining his audience, it may be reasonably questioned that he wrote his tragedies with these high moral purposes clearly in his mind; on the other hand, even though the essay is merely an *à posteriori* rationalization of May's dramatic purpose, his classical training must have convinced him that this indeed was the real function of tragedy.

May is the author of four tragedies, all dealing with classical themes—*The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queene of Aegypt; The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina, Empresse of Rome; The Tragedy of Antigone the Theban Princesse;* and a Latin *Julius Caesar.* A brief statement concerning the dates of composition and publication of these plays will suffice. According to a statement in the first edition of the play, as well as in a contemporary manuscript copy,[2] *The Tragedy of Cleopatra,* although not printed until 1639, was acted in 1626. Similarly, *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina,* published in the same year as *Cleopatra,* contains, on the same page with the list of "Speakers," the statement that the play was acted in 1628. The mention of specific dates probably carries more weight than the vague assertion, "Acted with much applause," which not infrequently is our only evidence for the public performance of old plays; we may therefore accept the years 1626 and 1628 as the dates of performance and the probable dates of composition for these two tragedies. *The Tragedy of Antigone,* printed in 1631 and apparently never acted, seems in some respects an earlier play than either of these. A large admixture of the romantic points backward towards May's early plays, as does an indebtedness to *Romeo and Juliet,*[3] which had certainly been May's principal model in the composition of *The Heir.* Moreover, a similarity to *Macbeth*[4] suggests that it was written shortly after a reading of that play, which was

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[1] *Tragedy of Antigone,* Epistle Dedicatory, Sg. A3r-A5v.
[2] British Museum, Royal MSS. 18 L. vii.
[3] See below, p. 123, 127.
[4] See below, p. 124, 127.

first published in the folio of 1623. Opposed to this supposition of an early date, however, is the circumstance that in one scene of *Antigone* May leans heavily on his own translation of the seventh book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, which did not appear in print until 1627. It is possible, of course, that May had made this translation several years before it was published; but such a supposition is scarcely warranted, since the translation of the complete *Pharsalia* seems to have been made in response to the success of the translation of the first book, published in 1626. It is perhaps necessary, therefore, in spite of the facts mentioned above, to suppose that the relation between *Antigone* and the *Pharsalia* establishes the year 1627 as the anterior limit for the composition of the play.

Concerning the Latin tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, our suppositions must be even more tenuous. Although this play, which never reached the press, existed for many years in manuscript, it has disappeared without a trace.[5] If we exclude the possibility that May wrote it during the tender years of his residence at Cambridge, two possible dates of composition suggest themselves. The first of these is the period of May's residence at Gray's Inn—that is, 1616 or 1617—when the play may have been written for performance at the Inns of Court.[6] A more plausible supposition would be a date between 1625 and 1630, during which years May's attention was engaged by Roman history, as witness his English tragedies and his translation of the *Pharsalia*, the latter a work which undoubtedly served as an important source for the play.[7] We may conclude, I think, that all of May's tragedies were written between 1625 and 1631.

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[5] The authors of the *Biographia Dramatica* (3 vols., London, 1812. Part II, Vol. i, 503) state that the manuscript was in the possession of "Mr. Steven Jones." So also Halliwell-Phillipps (*Dictionary of Old English Plays*, 1860): "*Julius Caesar*. A Latin tragedy by Thomas May. The original manuscript of this play, which is in five short acts, was in the possession of Steven Jones." From this it would appear that Halliwell-Phillipps had seen the manuscript, but a search of numerous catalogues has revealed no trace of it. I have a letter from Mr. B. Barnett, of Ilford, Essex, saying that he too has searched fruitlessly, and that Professor W. W. Greg suggests an examination of Halliwell's papers, which he believes to be "somewhere in America."

[6] Fleay, *Chronicle History*, 420, gives the tentative date 1616, without offering his reasons for suggesting that year.

[7] Professor Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, II, 579, suggests the date 1625.

Chronologically, therefore, May's Roman tragedies, which we may consider first, stand almost at the end of a long series of dramas on similar themes which had its beginning in such plays of our dramatic nonage as Richard Bower's *Appius and Virginia* (c. 1563) and Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (1570). In a critical consideration of May's dramas, however, it is unnecessary to trace the long history of Roman plays through Lodge's *Wounds of Civil Wars;* the lost *Julius Sesar*, *Pompey*, and *Sylla Dictator;* the half-dozen or so Roman tragedies which seem to have had their origin in Henslowe's prolific workshop; the roughly dramatized mythology of Heywood's *Golden Age*, *Silver Age*, and *Brazen Age*; or the innumerable and frequently indistinguishable *Neroes* and *Catalines*, in both Latin and English, which were written for the delectation of the young gentlemen at the universities or the Inns of Court.[8] For as a "chosen friend" of Ben Jonson, and a classical scholar to boot, May as a matter of course followed his master in theory, and partially in practice, in the composition of Roman tragedies. Jonson, therefore, is the starting point of any attempt to discover what May was about in the writing of such plays.

The first of Jonson's tragedies, it will be remembered, was a self-conscious, somewhat schoolmasterish attempt to correct earlier dramatists who had levied upon classical material. The Roman plays which immediately preceded *Sejanus* fall roughly into two groups. In the first group were the dramas of such cultivated gentlemen as Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville, Samuel Brandon, and Sir William Alexander, all of whom followed the fashion, inaugurated by the Countess of Pembroke, that Elizabethan Blue-stocking, of imitating Robert Garnier, the "French Senecan," who in such plays as *Porcie*, *Cornelie*, and *M. Antoine* had applied his own modifications of Senecan dramaturgy to the treatment of Roman history. The plays of this group—the most important being Daniel's *Cleopatra* and *Philotas*, Greville's *Alaham*, Brandon's *Virtuous Octavia*, and Alexander's *Four Monarchic Tragedies*—have elsewhere been described in

[8] On the whole development of "Classical Myth and Story" in the Elizabethan drama, see F. E. Schelling, *op. cit.*, II, 1–50.

detail;[9] it is sufficient to note here their careful adherence to Senecan principles and the fact that, as the products of an aristocratic coterie, they were purely literary and not intended for popular performance. The other Roman plays which preceded Jonson's consisted, of course, of those intended for popular performance, and reached their highest development in Shakespeare. At the risk of impertinence, the writer may repeat, as a matter of record, the observation, made by all commentators, that Shakespeare, permitting his imagination to play at will upon material culled from North's *Plutarch*, produced thereby plays which, whatever their lamentable deficiencies as history or archeology, must be ranked with the greatest dramas in the language.

The plays of both these groups Jonson deplored. It is likely, although we have no record of the fact,[10] that his robust practicality caused him to look with scorn upon the cloistered, somewhat emasculated, classicism of the Countess of Pembroke and her circle; and a well-established tradition is authority for a belief that Jonson's classical scholarship was outraged by Shakespeare's disregard—to us a sure sign of genius, to Jonson a clear proof of ignorance—for the facts of history. Accordingly, in 1603 he wrote *Sejanus His Fall*, and eight years later *Cataline His Conspiracy*. Jonson's particular aim, we may be sure, was to write a tragedy that would achieve success on the popular stage and at the same time portray the truth of Roman history and Roman custom. He had no intention, however, of writing tragedy in the strictly classical form. Although he attempted a greater regularity than Shakespeare, he was sufficiently an individualist to affirm, in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, his right to as much freedom as the ancients themselves were wont to exercise; and he was sufficiently the man of the theatre to declare that it was

> almost impossible in these our times, and to such auditors as commonly

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[9] Schelling, *op. cit.*, II, 5–15; M. W. Croll, *The Works of Fulke Greville*, University of Pennsylvania Thesis, 1903; 33–35.

[10] We do know, however, that in two of his plays (*Every Man In His Humour*, and *Every Man Out of His Humour*) Jonson parodied the non-dramatic verse of Daniel, one of the members of the group.

things are presented, to observe the old state and splendour of dramatic poems with preservation of any popular delight.[11]

With respect to his Roman tragedies, therefore, Jonson's classicism may be said to lie in his aspiration towards antiquarian accuracy, and the "truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence,"[12] of classic tragedy.

Although Jonson succeeded splendidly in carrying out his own intention, his efforts fell short of success on the popular stage. This, in an age of romantic drama of which Shakespeare reflected the fashion, is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that younger dramatists like Marston, Fletcher, and Massinger,—in such plays as *Sophonisba*, *The False One*, *Valentinian*, *The Bondman*, and *The Roman Actor*—as well as such minor writers as Goffe, Cartwright, and Gough, should have followed Shakespeare in dealing freely and romantically with classical story. A few dramatists, however, did follow Jonson's lead in attempting to portray Roman history accurately on the stage. Of this group, the anonymous author of the *Tragedy of Nero* (1624) is the finest playwright. At the other end of the scale are the prolix *Hannibal and Scipio* (1635) of Thomas Nabbes and the late *Tragedy of Messalina the Roman Empress* (1640) of Nathaniel Richards. More important than either of these, and only slightly inferior to the tragedies of Jonson himself and the anonymous writer mentioned above, are the Roman plays of Thomas May, who is therefore entitled to a respectable position as a follower of Jonson in plays of this kind.

So obviously did May attempt to follow his master's method that he may be credited, I think, with a conscious effort, in the face of the popular unsuccess of *Sejanus* and *Cataline*, to revive the Jonsonian tradition. Moreover, it may fairly be said that no playwright of the age had a better scholarly equipment for the task. Reference has already been made to his wide knowledge of the Roman and Greek historians;[13] and we shall

[11] *Sejanus;* "To the Reader".
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] See above, p. 24.

have occasion to refer again to the subject in the subsequent discussion of his translations and narrative poems. With the ancient dramatists also, as well as with the historians, he had a close familiarity which enabled him, like Jonson, to make a sensible adaptation of their dramatic methods for the English stage. Indeed, although the endeavor to discover the exact extent of his classical reading might not lead into such recondite back-waters of learning as would a similar pursuit of Jonson, it may safely be said that May's erudition fell only a little short of that of his predecessor. Much of this learning, it may be added, went into the composition of *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina*. But here again, in spite of the similarity in the training of the two men, it is necessary to point out the fundamental difference in temperament between them. In the preceding chapter, frequent reference was made to the fact that May was possessed of an inherent romanticism from which, despite the influence of Jonson, he never escaped. In his Roman tragedies, if in any of his writings, May might have been expected to slough off what must have seemed to Jonson the tainting influence of Shakespeare and Fletcher. But, either from choice or inability, May did not do so. Again and again, as will be pointed out, the romantic note, whether as conception of character, love-incident, or merely ornamental detail, creeps into these tragedies. Consequently, although May is definitely the follower of Jonson with respect to antiquarian zeal, even to the extent of pedantic documentation of his texts, he is also, and perhaps only subconsciously, an imitator, no less in tragedy than in comedy, of Shakespeare.

In conformity with the practice of Jonson, however, May went directly to classical historians for his plot-material. The researches of German scholarship, following the directions of Langbaine, have already ferreted out, in exact detail, the sources of May's Roman plays;[14] a brief account in this place will therefore be sufficient. For *Cleopatra*, Plutarch's ever interesting

[14] See Heinrich Wolf, Thomas May's *Tragedy of Cleopatra Queen of Aegypt*, Strassburg Dissertation, 1914, which is concerned entirely with sources; and the edition of *Julia Agrippina* by F. E. Schmid, in *Materialien zur Kunde des alteren Englischen Dramas*, Vol. 43, Louvain, 1912.

life of Mark Antony and the 49th, 50th and 51st books of Dio Cassius' *Roman History* served as the principal sources;[15] in a general way, it may be said that May worked up his characters from the former, his historical background from the latter. In addition, a number of other writers furnished minor details and embellishments: thus the account of the Psylli, the primitive toxicologists employed by Augustus in the attempt to save Cleopatra's life, is based upon descriptions in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (XXI, 78) and Suetonius' *Divus Augustus* (cap. 17); certain details concerning the battle of Actium come from Florus' *Epitomae* (II. 21); many of the facts concerning Pharos, Antony's isle of refuge, were taken from Strabo's *Geographica* (lib. 17); while there are frequent echoes from Lucan, May's favorite Latin poet. Similarly, the principal sources of *Julia Agrippina* were the *Annales* of Tacitus (principally the twelfth book), the eleventh century epitome of Dio Cassius' *Roman History* by Joannes Xiphilinus, and the life of Nero by Suetonius. Additional material May culled from Petronius Arbiter,[16] Sallust, Pliny, and Vergil.[17]

The historical basis of *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina* obviates the necessity of giving extended synopses of these plays. May's *Cleopatra* begins at a point later in the development of the story than that at which Shakespeare began his *Antony and Cleopatra*. Antony has already returned to Rome, married Octavia, conducted his campaign against the Parthians and come ignobly back to Cleopatra when we are introduced to the pair at the banquet at which Antony, heedless of the note of danger sounded by the messengers from Rome, confers upon Cleopatra the three

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[15] Wolf. p. 3, finds forty-nine points of specific indebtedness to Dio, thirty-nine to Plutarch.

[16] His inclusion of Petronius's satiric comment on Lucan has been cited as proof of May's fickle loyalty even to his literary idols. The dramatic suitability of the inclusion is sufficient answer to the charge.

[17] It may be mentioned here, that it is not unlikely that the germ-idea of the play had its origin less in classical writers than in May's familiarity with *Sejanus*, in which a younger Agrippina plays an important part, and with the well-known *Tragedy of Nero*, which treats of Nero at the end of his career, and of Poppaea, an important character in May's play. A still closer indebtedness to Jonson is the presence of an Induction in which appear Megaera and the ghost of Caligula.

kingdoms of the East. From that point, the play moves swiftly, through an account of the preparation for war with Caesar and of Antony's spineless submission to Cleopatra's demand that she be permitted to accompany the troops, to an account of the battle of Actium itself, which is told, in true classical fashion, through the mouth of Gallus, a messenger. From that climactic point, we follow Antony through his period of bitterness for his own weakness, his suspicion of Cleopatra's faithfulness, his last unsuccessful engagement with Caesar, and ultimately his death at his own hand. The play closes, naturally, with the death of Cleopatra.

Julia Agrippina may be summarized with almost equal brevity. It tells of the efforts of that male-spirited woman, Agrippina, wife of the Emperor Claudius, to have Nero, her unlovely son by a former husband, named successor to the Emperor at the expense of the boy Britannicus, Claudius's son by an earlier marriage. Spurred on by the cunning Pallas, a "new man," and by lesser flatterers of whom Seneca is not the least important, she arranges for the cashiering of the loyal captains of the praetorian guard and the appointment in their place of men of her own faction. Although Claudius is warned by loyal friends that his life is in danger, he refuses to believe the reports of his wife's treachery, and pays for his folly with his life when Agrippina's servants place poison in his food. The triumph of this relentless woman is apparently complete when Nero, supported by the praetorian guard in the streets and by the smooth-tongued Seneca in the Senate-house, is proclaimed Emperor. But her moment of supremacy is brief. Nero, none too amiably aware of his mother's nature and haunted by the fear for his personal safety which is a symptom of his incipient insanity, indicates his refusal to share his honors with Agrippina by forbidding her to sit with him at the audience granted to the Armenian ambassadors. Following an open quarrel in which Agrippina threatens to espouse the cause of the young Britannicus, the new Emperor resolves that both his step brother and his mother must be removed from the scene. After having Britannicus poisoned, he sends his mother to Baiae, ostensibly that she may participate in the feast of Minerva. But Agrippina has

seen the body of the unfortunate Britannicus, and she knows that she is going to her death. Her fears are fully justified. Although she twice escapes death at Baiae, she returns to Rome only to be stabbed by Nero's agents, and dies cursing Nero, and reproaching herself for having given this monster birth.

Had May been merely an historian dabbling in drama, he might have told these stories with bleak fidelity to historical fact but with no regard for dramatic effectiveness or picturesque detail. His romanticism, however, no less than his feeling for dramatic narrative, led him to embellish his plays with material unimportant as history—although it is gleaned from his sources —but effective as dramatic ornamentation. Thus in *Cleopatra* we find him making much of the astonishing display of lights with which Cleopatra illuminated her banquet hall when first she entertained her lover; of the ten kings who attended Antony's person at the battle of Actium; of Antony's melancholy after the battle, when, in the habit of Timon, he went into seclusion at Pharos; of Cleopatra's charming experiments upon condemned prisoners with strange and subtle poisons; and of the omens and portents which warned the world of Antony's ruin. Other details might be mentioned; but since they are found also in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, May is open to some suspicion of having used them merely in imitation of our greatest dramatist. In addition to these things, May, despite his antiquarianism and the restraining influence of Jonson, is always sufficiently the romantic artist to use historical material with some freedom: when the exigencies of the drama demand it, he does not hesitate to transfer details from one historical scene to another, or to assign to one of his characters speeches and actions which history attributes to quite a different personage. In *Julia Agrippina*, May's departure from strictly Jonsonian methods is seen less in the use of ornamental detail than in the addition of a romantic sub-plot. This love story of Otho the friend of Nero, and Poppoea the wife of Crispinus, tells how that lady, when Nero looked upon her and found her fair, transferred her easy affections to the Emperor in the face of the pleadings of her former lover and the threats of Nero's wife Octavia; and how she shed crocodile tears when Otho was as-

signed, beyond his expectation and against his wish, to the governorship of the distant Spanish province of Lusitania. One result of May's deviations from the strictly classical method is that in some respects *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina* are more entertaining than their Jonsonian prototypes. It must not be inferred from this statement that May's plays are superior to Jonson's, for both *Sejanus* and *Cataline* have a firmness of structure and a height of poetry which *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina* never achieve. It is true, however, that as a result of romantic additions in the form of adornments and sub-plot, May's tragedies have more color than Jonson's. In addition, of course, the story of Cleopatra has more essential interest than the themes of either of Jonson's tragedies. Moreover, by reason of a greater variety of action, May's Roman dramas move more rapidly than Jonson's. They are thereby less open to the criticism, not unjust in the case of *Sejanus* and *Cataline*, of being static rather than dynamic, and having less the effect of a drama than of the studied rhetorical perfection of a Ciceronian oration.

Mention of the narrative rapidity of May's plays raises at once the question of their stage effectiveness. There is no evidence to show that either *Cleopatra* or *Julia Agrippina* ever enjoyed any popular success upon the stage; in that respect, however, May merely shared the fate of his teacher Jonson. It must be remembered, too, that May definitely turned away from one avenue to popular success when he followed the rules of classical dramaturgy to the extent of rigidly excluding all comic scenes from his tragedies. Shakespeare, of course, was unhandicapped by a knowledge of, or at least veneration for, the classical practice; consequently we find comic passages in all his tragedies, historical or otherwise. Even Jonson, a sounder classicist than May, admitted several scenes of comedy into his Roman tragedies, particularly *Sejanus*. May, on the other hand, introduced no such scenes (unless a few passages of satiric comment in both plays be regarded as "comic"[18]), and so eschewed the commonest of Elizabethan devices for delighting the groundlings. Moreover,

[18] Genest (*Some Account of the English Stage*, 10 vols., Bath, 1832. X, 49) says that there are "some few comic speeches" in *Cleopatra*. Perhaps he has these passages in mind.

these plays, like all historical drama, suffer from the fact that it is difficult to put history on the stage. The question whether or not the author has performed the task successfully cannot, of course, be answered from a mere reading of the play; the glare of the footlights, not the glow of the library-lamp, must give us illumination on this point. Thus it is easy enough to say of a given historical play that it would not "go" in the theatre. The astonishing fact is that many of them do "go" very well; whatever one may think of Mr. Shaw, *St. Joan* is a notable case in point. Across a gulf of three centuries, therefore, it would be folly to dogmatize about the stage effectiveness, or lack of it, in May's Roman tragedies. Their apparent failure in the theatre is perhaps sufficient answer to the question, although it must be kept in mind that the temper of the time was opposed to such plays, and that two decades earlier they might have been successful. It is not surprising, however, that one or two critics have asserted flatly that May's Roman plays are closet-drama only. Thus Genest[19] of *Julia Agrippina:*

> . . . the dialogue is well written, and the Dramatis Personae are justly delineated . . . but . . . it is hardly possible to bring such characters as Nero and Agrippina on the stage with good effect . . . the conclusion is very correct as a history but very flat as a drama.

Thus begging the question of the absolute theatrical effectiveness of these two plays, it is nevertheless possible to speak with some finality of their comparative merits as dramas. In most respects, *Cleopatra* is a better play than *Julia Agrippina*. At first reading, to be sure, the latter play may seem the better, but its apparent advantage lies merely in the fact that its theme is less familiar than that of *Cleopatra* and therefore seems to have claim to a greater originality. A more critical examination of the two plays, however, will inevitably award the palm to *Cleopatra*. Genest's charge that *Julia Agrippina* is "flat as a drama" is substantiated in large measure by the fact that in writing the play May exercised a predilection for the Greek

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[19] *Ibid*, X, 49.

method of telling a story on the stage; consequently, he resorts to the device of the messenger (not formally, but in the person of one of the characters) in many scenes where the Elizabethan audience, and the modern reader, would have preferred direct action. As a matter of fact, it is not until the play is well into the fourth act that the opposing forces come together on the stage. Moreover, in *Julia Agrippina* May seemed to experience more than his share of the usual difficulties of getting the historical material on the stage; and since he had not the genius of a Shakespeare to make each scene interesting in its own right, by reason of the presence of profoundly interesting characters or some other device for securing dramatic effectiveness, the result is several scenes of mere history which are very flat indeed. In *Cleopatra*, on the other hand, May seems to have avoided both of these difficulties. Perhaps this is due to the fact that in this play, May, however definitely he belonged to the tribe of Ben, necessarily followed the path that Shakespeare had cut through the Cleopatra story. Perhaps it is also due to the fact that the story of Antony and Cleopatra, while it is historical chronicle, is also, in a manner of speaking, a natural drama upon which, by a happy concurrence of circumstances, fate has not permitted history to obtrude. To put it more bluntly, the story furnishes almost "fool-proof" material for an historical play. At any rate, May succeeds in eliminating scenes of merely historical interest; and he succeeds in dramatizing his material to the extent that most of the action—the most notable exception is the messenger's account of the battle of Actium, an episode which not even the resources of a modern revue producer could stage successfully—is worked out directly upon the stage. The result is that *Cleopatra* is less episodic than *Julia Agrippina*, and has consequently a more sustained dramatic interest. Certainly, of the two plays, *Cleopatra* would have the greater chance for success in the theatre. Apart from these matters of technique, however, there is one other important respect in which *Cleopatra* is superior. In *Julia Agrippina*, the two opposing forces are Nero and his mother, both of them evil; when, therefore, Nero ultimately triumphs, we feel no sense of the cleansing power of tragedy or of an inexorable universal law whose violators have

been punished. Although the story takes its artistic justification from Agrippina's fierce maternal instinct, the result of the opposition of two evil forces is a drama too close to the Senecan tragedy of revenge, in which murder for its own sake plays a prominent part, to be entirely satisfactory to a modern reader. In *Cleopatra*, on the other hand, Antony and Cleopatra go down before a universal law; it is not Octavius Caesar who conquers them, but the forces of order for which Octavius happens to be the agent. It is to history's credit, not May's, that the story of Cleopatra is better suited for tragic drama than the story of Agrippina; at the same time, we have here one strong reason why *Cleopatra* is the more satisfactory drama of the two.

Turning aside from the dramatic effectiveness of these plays in their totality, even the severest critic will be willing to admit that in each there is a number of effective scenes. Remembering the masterful scenes in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*—Cleopatra's jealous rage when Antony first returned to Rome, for example, or the ever memorable drinking-bout aboard Pompey's galley—one might be inclined to criticize May for opportunities missed and possibilities ignored. We must keep in mind, however, that May was at least partially the historian, and that he lacked Shakespeare's instinctive genius for separating a fact of merely human interest from a welter of historical data. Moreover, it is egregiously unfair to compare May with Shakespeare; we must not let the brilliance of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies blind us to the fact that there are some really strong scenes in *Cleopatra*. There is the scene in which Cleopatra, using all her wiles and blandishments, persuades Antony to take her with him to Actium; the scene in which the priest Achoreus and the Egyptian generals pathetically predict the ruin of Egypt, whichever Roman faction triumphs; the scene in which Antony, having fled to Pharos, glooms in misanthropic remorse; the scene in which Antony takes his own life; finally, the scene in which Cleopatra, queen and courtesan to the end, prepares for death, saying,

> This is my second coronation day;
> But nobler than the first, and fuller far

> Of real honour and magnificence.
> Not till this pompous hour was Cleopatra
> A perfect queen. Alas, I did not sway
> A sceptre over fortune, or command,
> As I now do, the destinies themselves.
> I wore a painted honour, a mere shadow
> Of royal state, and such a feeble crown
> As war could threaten, treason undermine,
> And every puff of fortune blow it off—
> My fear is constant now, my thoughts above
> The fear of danger, or opposing foes.[20]

So too in *Julia Agrippina* there are several scenes which rise to a fairly high level of effectiveness. When the faithful Narcissus pleads with Claudius to remove Agrippina from the scene before she attempts to take the life of the emperor, we have a scene which is reminiscent of, although of course it does not equal, those moments when Kent pleads with Lear to forsake his folly. Again, when Nero and Agrippina, stripping off their pretenses of affection for each other, stand revealed in their true natures, there is another moment of sufficient dramatic intensity. Effective also are the love-duets between Otho and Poppaea, before the latter began to dream of grandeur; and the banquet scene in which young Britannicus refuses to pay homage to Nero, who has cheated him of a throne.

Just as he gives us a few strong scenes, May gives us a few well-developed characters. Despite his classicism, he makes Cleopatra into a symbol of wonder and delight. His failure to make her conform to the classical pattern is further indication of the way in which the romantic influence of Shakespeare could sway even the most serious members of the opposing school. But in treating Cleopatra, May followed neither Shakespeare, who made her unswerving in her devotion to Antony, nor Fletcher, who in *The False One* makes her a mere light-of-love, ready, when her interest in Julius Caesar has waned and Antony is about to arrive, to cry "The King is dead; long live the King." Instead, he follows Dio and Plutarch, who tell us definitely

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[20] Sg. E1v.

that Cleopatra intended to use her blandishments to enchant Octavius. Accordingly, in May's play, Cleopatra is historically accurate, although momentarily less admirable. Told that Octavius wishes to see her, she sets out somewhat defiantly to charm him. When Octavius resists her, she fawns upon him, but realizing the uncertainty of her position she leaves those tactics and is thereafter faithful to Antony. But there is still the note of hypocrisy in her voice when, replying to Antony's charges of disloyalty, she says:

> Can he, for whose dear sake
> A queen so highly born as I preferr'd
> Love before fame, and fondly did neglect
> All names of honor when false Fulvia
> And proud Octavia had the name of wives,
> Requite me thus? . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . but if you think me false
> Here sheath your sword: make me the subject rather
> Of manly rage than childish jealousy.
> It is a nobler crime, and fitter far
> For you to act, easier for me to suffer.[21]

There can be no question, therefore, that, according to May, Cleopatra in this situation behaved ignobly; her justification is that she was trying to save her own life. It may be added also that in having his Cleopatra waver thus, May makes her true, not only historically to fact, but artistically to the type to which she belonged. But when her fate is assured, she takes on new nobility. There is sincerity in the following lament for Antony:

> I have been too, too slack
> In coming to him: this that here lies dead
> Was but the house that lodg'd my dearest lord,
> That earthly mansion, that did once contain
> The kindest, noblest, and the truest soul
> That ever liv'd; and this our second meeting

[21] Sg. D5v.

> Is far more sweet, and full of noble love
> Than when we first met in Cilicia,
> When our magnificence and pomp did fill
> The world with wonder and astonishment . . .[22]

And there is grandeur in her death. May's Cleopatra is a real human being, not a lay figure; although she is based on history, her character exists independently of history. The conception of the character is completely revealed in the play; one need not have a knowledge of history to comprehend her. May's Cleopatra is not so great as Shakespeare's or as Dryden's; such a comparison would be absurd. But taking her for the selfish, vacillating, and none too courageous creature that May intended her to be, she is a well-conceived and well-realized character.

In *Julia Agrippina*, the character of Agrippina is similarly well-developed. She is introduced to us at the height of her "career," when her liaison with the unscrupulous Pallas has brought her to a commanding position in affairs of state. Seneca, who appears as a minor character in the play, serves as a chorus to comment on the true nature of Agrippina; it is he who shows how Agrippina has overstepped herself and how she is headed for ultimate destruction. At the moment of her triumph, May makes us feel the fierce ruthlessness of this Roman Lady Macbeth. But when Nero turns against her, Agrippina becomes a pitiful figure; wicked as she has been, we must realize that her wickedness has grown from a misguided and too fierce maternal instinct, and that she was even more ambitious for her son than for herself. There is something fine about her denunciation of Nero in the fourth act, and there is a note of sincerity in her lament for her past wickedness. After Nero's unsuccessful first attempt to have her murdered, she conducts herself with heroic stoicism, and in her death she achieves real dignity. As in the case of the Thane of Cawdor, nothing in her life became her like the leaving it. May's Agrippina derives definitely from the brief sketch of the same lady in *Sejanus* and from Lady Macbeth; but she has an

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[22] Sg. E2[r].

individuality of her own which is at once dramatically effective and consistent with history. To condemn Agrippina utterly would be to misread her character. Vain and unscrupulous she unquestionably was, but May, with considerable insight, sees the other side of her nature, and it is this side which he emphasizes in the closing scenes of the play.

Naturally, these two women are the outstanding figures in May's tragedies. It must not be thought, however, that there are no other characters of interest. In *Cleopatra*, Antony, although he lacks the largeness of Shakespeare's Antony, is well-drawn, particularly in the latter part of the play, when he realizes whither his infatuation for Cleopatra has led him. So too, in a minor way are Octavius Caesar and Canidius; the latter, although he is half in love with Cleopatra, is another Enobarbus, and helps to preserve the reader's sense of value. In *Julia Agrippina*, the most interesting minor characters are Nero, who is portrayed in the period before he lapsed into insanity; Poppaea, soft, vain, and withal shrewd, who at first is sincerely in love with Otho but later realizes the magnificent possibilities in a union with Nero; and Otho, half gull and half lady-killer, who comes closer to being a comic character than anyone else in either of May's Roman plays. Since all of these characters are historical, it is of course impossible to give May full credit for their creation. But he may justly be praised for the skill with which he has brought them alive in his pages, and for preserving them as human beings whose behavior is consistent with the laws of human nature as well as with the facts of history.

Perhaps it was partly the effective scenes and adequate characterization in May's Roman plays that led Fleay,[23] in a moment of hasty speculation, to suggest the possibility that May was also the author of the *Tragedy of Nero*, "newly written" in 1624 by an anonymous author. A more specific reason for Fleay's suggestion was that an entry in the Stationers' Register under date 24 October, 1633, records the transfer from Thomas Jones to "Master" Matthews of the rights to thirteen books, among them May's *Heir* and his translation of Lucan, and this same

[23] *Biographical Chronicle*, II, 84.

Tragedy of Nero[24]; since Jones had the rights to works of both May and the unknown author, reasoned Fleay, it was not unlikely that May was the author of the *Tragedy of Nero*. Fleay's supposition is not a happy one; the only supporting evidence is the date,[25] which is only slightly antecedent to that of May's Roman plays, and the fact that the author was well versed in Tacitus and other Roman historians. As opposed to these, an examination of the unknown author's use of sources, as well as his versification and general style, reveals clearly a method different from May's; Schmid, who has painstakingly compared the play with *Julia Agrippina* in these respects, rightly concludes that the two tragedies are not the work of the same hand.[26] Intuitive criticism arrives at the same result; the author of the *Tragedy of Nero* had a poetical insight and a mastery of phrase which May, worthy craftsman though he was, could never compass. Much as the friendly critic of May would like to believe him the author of this splendid play, the evidence is against any such assumption.

But May does not need the addition of *The Tragedy of Nero* to the list of his Roman dramas to entitle him to a respectable position among later writers of plays of this kind. Both *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina* are worthy the attention of any close student of the older drama. Their defects arise, not from any failure on the part of their author to carry out his intention, but from weakness inherent in the intention itself. The difficulty, experienced by even the greatest dramatists, of transmuting the facts of history, with their limitations of time, place, and circumstance, into the universal truth of art, makes the plays

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[24] "Master Mathews, Assigned over unto him by vertue of a note under the hand and seal of Thomas Jones and by consent of a full court all the estate, right, title, and interest which the said Thomas Jones hath in these copies herafter mentioned." A list of the books follows. *Stationers' Register*, ed. Arber, IV, 307.

[25] Herbert P. Horne, in the introduction to the edition of the play in the *Mermaid Series* (Vol. VIII) points out that Bullen (*Old English Plays*, I, 10) was in error in supposing this play an adaptation of *The Tragedie of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, published in 1607.

[26] See the appendix to his edition of *Julia Agrippina*, *Materialien*, Vol. 43. He says in conclusion: ". . . machen all diese Umstände es recht wahrscheinlich, dass May für die Abfassung des Nero nicht im Frage kommen kann." (p. 216).

subject to certain inevitable defects. The same flaws, however, are to be found in the tragedies of Jonson and all the others who followed in his steps. On the other hand, *Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina* are strong plays, and suffer only slightly from comparison with the tragedies of Jonson himself.

Turning now to the *Tragedy of Antigone the Theban Princess*, we find that in taking the material for this play from Greek drama, May essayed a classical experiment which not even Jonson had attempted. As has often been pointed out,[27] Greek drama, as compared with Latin, exercised a negligible influence upon Elizabethan writers; their assumption that Seneca, and in part Euripides (who—to reverse the usual statement—was the most Senecan of all the Greeks) constituted the whole of classical tragedy, precluded the possibility of their going directly to Greek tragedy for either method or themes. Nor did the Greek comic writer fare better; it is Plautus and Terence, not Aristophanes, who contribute the slight classical element that participated in the formation of English comedy. There was, however, a moment when the growing influence of Humanism seemed almost to attempt the compression of English drama into a Greek mould. Thus we hear of at least one Greek play—the *Plutus* of Aristophanes—being acted in its original tongue at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1536; and eight years later came the sole extant example of a sixteenth century drama written in Greek — the Ιεφθάε of John Christopherson, of Trinity College in the same University. About the same time George Buchanan, the Scottish humanist, translated certain tragedies of Sophocles,[28] as well as the *Medea* and *Alcestis* of Euripides, into Latin for the further instruction of youth; and some time later the Cambridge scholars, Ascham and Thomas Watson, translated (into Latin, of course) respectively the *Medea* of Euripides and the *Antigone* of Sophocles. Among later translations from Greek into Latin are the *Meleager*, *Ulysses Redux*,

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[27] F. E. Schelling, *op. cit.*, II, 1–3; and L. E. Kastner and H. B. Charlton (eds.), *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander*, 2 vols., Manchester, 1921. Introduction, I, xvii-lxiii.

[28] Buchanan's Sophoclean translations have seldom been noted. See Kastner and Charlton, xlix, note.

and *Oedipus*, all by William Gager; and an *Iphegenia* by George Peele, who is said to have made the translation under Gager's influence. Mention is likewise made of an *Ajax Flagellifer*, which was designed in 1564 for performance at Oxford before the Queen, but which had to be postponed as a result of her Majesty's indisposition from over-exertion.[29] We read also, in the account books of the Revels Office, of an *Effiginia*, an *Alcmaeon*, an *Hypolitus*, and an *Oedipus*, acted variously at the Universities, the Court, and the several Inns of Court.[30]

Most of the plays—all of them comparatively early—mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are academic in their nature; and it may safely be said that at the Universities, if any place, the Greek influence on the drama might have been expected to persist. Even here, however, the influence of Seneca (which —whether from superior availability over the Greek dramatists, or merely from a greater appeal to Renaissance taste—had already changed the course of popular tragedy) began to make itself felt. The original plays of Buchanan, such as *Baptistes* and *Jephthes*, are strongly Senecan, and are said to have played an important part in establishing the European reputation of Seneca;[31] and Ascham himself confessed to having turned *Philocletes* into Latin "in the manner of Seneca." Thereafter the influence of the Roman playwrights becomes stronger, the direct influence of the Greeks weaker, on plays of the academic variety; and with the coming of age of the popular drama, in the 'eighties and early 'nineties, and the consequent tendency of the academic drama to increase the variety of its themes to include plays on English history, as well as satire on contemporary affairs, the contact of academic drama with the Greek is broken almost entirely. With respect to the popular stage such contact may fairly be said never to have existed. Whatever relation there was took the form of adaptation of Greek drama through a Latin, sometimes in addition an Italian or a French, intermediary. A characteristic early example is Gascoigne's *Jocasta*, which derives from the Greek only through Seneca and Dolce. Equally well-

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[29] Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age*, Oxford, 1914; 97.
[30] Schelling, *op. cit.*, II, 2-3.
[31] Kastner and Charlton, 1.

known are the *Medea*, the *Oedipus*, the *Thebais*, the *Thyestis*, and others, which, however Greek the sound of their titles, are translations of Seneca made in the 'sixties and gathered together in 1591 under the title of *Seneca His Ten Tragedies*. From our knowledge of these, we may sufficiently imagine how far removed from direct Greek inspiration were Dekker's *Orestes Furies*, Chettle's *Troy's Revenge*, and the *Agamemnon* of these two men in collaboration, three plays which were acted in 1599 according to Henslowe, and all to be numbered among the plays which have not come down to us. From these, and from our knowledge of the Elizabethan academic plays, we can justly conclude that English drama between the time of the Armada (which coincides almost exactly with the triumph of Seneca) and the death of James remained almost untouched by direct Greek influences. The closest approach to anything of the sort is a play on the subject of *Ajax Flagellifer* performed before King James at Oxford in 1605; and even pedantic royalty, it is reported, "was very weary before he came thither, but much more wearied by it, and spoke many words of dislike."[32]

During the reign of Charles, however, there occurred a slight recrudescence of interest in Greek drama; and at least three minor playwrights adapted Greek plays for English readers, if not for English theatrical audiences. The best known of these, *A Pleasant Comedie, Entituled Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery*,[33] an adaptation of the *Plutus* of Aristophanes, is described on its title-page as having been "translated" byThomas Randolph and "augmented and published by F. J." The exact share of each of the two authors in the work has not been determined; but the result of their combined labors is a curious composition in which Aristophanes' comedy serves merely as the groundwork for a superstructure of satiric comment upon the stage, the "queans" of Shoreditch, the Puritans and especially the lay-clergy preaching absurdly in Bell-Alley, as well as upon Prince Rupert, Cardinal Richelieu, and all alien popishness. Most of the satire, it will be observed, is launched at affairs

[32] *Cambridge History of English Literature*, VI, 317.

[33] Published in 1651, but certainly written in its original form before 1635, the year of Randolph's death.

which belong in the decade following the death of Randolph, and may consequently be attributed to "F. J." It is safe to suppose, therefore, that Randolph's original play was closer to its Aristophanean prototype than the play which was printed, although we may be equally sure, from our knowledge of Randolph's life and habits, that it was no merely scholarly translation. More interesting as an example of Greek influence, however, is the *Tragedy of Orestes*,[34] written by Thomas Goffe, Master of Arts of Christ's Church, Oxford, and acted by the students of the same house. In a Prologue, "spoken by the Author himself," the learned writer makes an interesting allusion to the private performance of the play:

> The hush'd contentment of two silent hours,
> Breathe pleasing airs on these attentive ears;
> And since we see in this well furnish'd room
> All our best neighbors are so kindly met,
> We would devise some pleasing talk to spend
> The lazy hours of the tedious night.[35]

Professing, however, his own weakness of invention, Goffe proposes

> to revive a tale
> Which once in Athens great Euripedes
> In better phrase at such a meeting told
> The learn'd Athenians, with much applause.
> The same we will retell into your ears,
> Whose Attic judgment is no less than theirs.
> We here, as builders which do oft take stones
> From out old buildings, then must hew and cut
> To make them square and fitting for a new,
> So from an old foundation we have ta'en
> Stones ready squar'd for our new edifice,
> Which if in pleasing our weak skill offends
> In making corners disproportionate,

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[34] Published in 1633, acted 1623. Goffe died in 1629.
[35] Sg. A3^{v}.

> Some room too narrow or some loft too high,
> Yet we will hope, if the whole structure fall,
> Your hands like props will serve to bear up all.[36]

Goffe's structure does not fall; and his squaring of old stones consists chiefly in putting on the stage those scenes of violence which the Greeks preferred to narrate rather than to act. A daring and effective scene is the killing of Agamemnon; and even more fraught with horror is that scene in the last act in which Orestes, now insane, plunges his dagger again and again into the dead body of Electra, while mad Cassandra looks on with idiotic laughter. On the whole, Goffe's play is a reasonably free adaptation of the Greek; he dispenses with the chorus entirely,—and he bolsters up his lines with frequent borrowings from Shakespeare, more particularly from *Hamlet*.

The third of the late plays based on the Greek is Thomas May's *Tragedy of Antigone the Theban Princesse*. Since there is no record that this play was ever acted, we have no way of knowing definitely whether it was, like Goffe's, an academic drama designed for a special audience, or whether it was intended for the public stage. It is evident, however, from May's free use of his sources, and from his obvious effort to vitalize the story at all points, that this was no mere literary exercise, to be numbered among the author's translations. On the other hand, we can well believe that it never reached the stage; for in the well-known words of Webster,

> Should a man present to such an auditory [the usual London audience] the most sententious tragedy that ever was written, observing all the critical laws as height of style, and gravity of person, enrich it with the sententious *Chorus*, and, as it were, lifen death, in the passionate and mighty *Nuntius*: yet after all this divine rapture, *Odura messorum Ilia*, the breath that comes from the uncapable multitude is able to poison it . . .[37]

If these conditions existed in 1612, they were even more strikingly apparent a decade and a half later; and he would have been a

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[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Preface to *The White Devil*. *Works*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, 4 vols., London, 1897. II, 6–8.

bold and spendthrift manager indeed who would have dared to put May's *Antigone* upon the boards.

The nucleus of May's drama is of course the *Antigone* of Sophocles.[38] In selecting the theme, May would seem to deserve credit as an innovator. Watson, to be sure, had made a Latin translation; but there is no record of an English version, either translation or adaptation, earlier than May's. The absence of English plays on the subject was due, in large measure, to the fact that Sophocles' *Antigone*, portraying as it does internal rather than external conflict, had not been attractive to the Roman temperament of Seneca and had therefore not experienced transmutation into Senecan tragedy either in Latin or English. May, however, went to Sophocles directly. In the main body of the story, he follows Sophocles' account of Creon's refusal to give burial to the bodies of Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone's secret burial of her beloved brother, Creon's consequent rage, Antigone's dreadful fate in being immured alive in a tomb, finally her death and those of Haemon and his mother Eurydice. In many instances May dramatizes this story by presenting directly on the stage much that in Sophocles was reported by messenger; notable examples are Antigone's visit to the "mourning fields" of Thebes and the deaths at the conclusion of the play. He also omits several Sophoclean episodes, the most important being the scene at the opening of the Greek play involving Antigone and her sister Ismene, and Haemon's personal appeal to his father to spare Antigone.

But May, in his attempt to produce an effective English play on the subject of Antigone, did not rely upon the Greek drama alone. To the story as told by Sophocles he added details, even whole themes, from Seneca, Statius, and Lucan. Thus the Sophoclean *Antigone*, as part of a dramatic trilogy, is lacking in what an English audience would regard as necessary exposition. Accordingly, May supplies the want by adding an opening

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[38] Langbaine (*English Dramatick Poets*, p. 361) notes Sophocles, Seneca, and Statius as May's sources. In the case of a classicist like May, there would seem to be no need to prove that he had the learning necessary to enable him to use a Greek source.

scene taken directly from the fragmentary *Phoenissae* of Seneca,[39] in which Antigone, in the process of leading her blind father to his refuge on Mount Cithaeron, reveals the tragic consequences which have followed the incestuous love of Jocasta and the son of Laius.

Even more important additions, with respect to dramatic effectiveness, are those which May derived from the *Thebaid* of Statius. The first of these is the account of the warfare between Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, for the kingship of Thebes. Their personal combat, mentioned only slightly by Sophocles, is told in richness of detail by Statius.[40] May, although he follows the Greek method of telling the episode by messenger, adorns his narrative of the event from Statius's account, with such good effect that it becomes one of the most telling passages in the play. A more extended borrowing from Statius is the account of the visit of Argia, Polyneices' Grecian wife, to Thebes to give her husband burial. Statius, who tells the story largely from the point of view of those who went "against Thebes," quite naturally gives prominence to this episode;[41] and May, seizing upon it, elaborates it into something very like a sub-plot, which reaches its climax when Argia and Antigone, both searching for Polyneices' body, meet on the plain before Thebes,[42] in the pitch blackness of the night, and lament bitterly, the one for her husband, the other for her brother.

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[39] How directly, the following parallel passages will indicate:

> Labdaci clarum domum,
> Opulenta ferro regna germani petant;
> Pars summa magni patris e regno mea est
> Pater ipse . . .
> (Seneca, ll. 53–56)

> While you are here, Cythaeron's craggy mount
> Is my abode, and far preferr'd before
> Labdacus' stately palace, or the towers
> Of wealthy Thebes, for which my brothers strive.
> What I there lov'd, I am possess'd of here,
> My father's presence . . .
> (May. Sg. B1v.)

[40] *Thebaid*, Book XI.

[41] The fact that Polyneices has married an Argive princess is barely alluded to by Sophocles.

[42] In Statius, the meeting between the women is recounted in Book XII, ll. 349 ff.

As a fourth source for his play, May went to his beloved Lucan, and more especially to his own translation of the *Pharsalia*. Here he found the description of the terrible field where lay the slaughtered soldiers after Pharsalia. Since there was, in both Sophocles and Statius, a hint of the horrors of the fields before Thebes, when Creon refused burial to the Argive host, May embroidered the idea with a passage—

> Thine anger boots not, Creon; 'tis all one
> Whether the fire or putrefaction
> Dissolve them; all to nature's bosom go,
> And to themselves their ends the bodies owe.
> If now the Argives bodies be not burn'd,
> They shall when earth and seas to flame are turn'd.
> Earth will, in spite of thee, receive again
> Whatever she brought forth; and they obtaine
> Heaven's coverture that have no graves at all.
> Thou that deny'st these people funeral,
> Why dost thou fly those slaughter-smelling fields?
> Breathe, if thou can'st, the air this sad place yields.
> Those vanquish'd carcasses alone possess
> The ground, and bar the conquerors access—

which is a literal transcript from his own translation of Lucan.[43] Moreover, May found in the *Pharsalia* the setting for the most startling scene in his play. In Sophocles it is hinted that Creon had scorned the prophet Teiresias, and in Statius we read of Teiresias's complaint that the gods pay less attention to him than to a hag of Thessaly or a Colchian witch, "who hunt with the sword the bloodless faces of the dead and pluck out their sickly tissues."[44] Using this as a starting point, and partly inspired by a recent reading of *Macbeth*, May devised a scene in which Creon consults three hags concerning his future. All the details of the loathsome art of these creatures May found in Lucan's account of the visit of Sextus to the witch Erictho. The latter's charming practice is to ransack graves, and use the eyes, tongues, finger-nails, and limbs, especially of hanged

[43] Compare *Antigone*, Sg. C3^{r}, with *Lucan's Pharsalia* (ed. 1635) Sg. N3^{r}.
[44] *Thebaid*, Book IV, ll. 500–511.

criminals, in concocting charms. When Sextus consults her, she seeks a corpse with tongue and lungs intact. Donning strange costume, and using foul incantations and a charm compounded of all obscene objects, she reanimates the corpse, which leaps bolt upright and in sepulchral voice predicts the future. In the *Antigone*, Creon and his hags go through the same performance. The scene is described in almost the exact words of May's translation of Lucan, the only modifications being those necessitated by the change in verse from the rimed-couplets of the translation to the blank verse of the play.[45]

Finally, in this consideration of May's sources, must be mentioned his indebtedness to the drama of his own day. This is most noticeable in the elaboration of the love story of Antigone and Haemon, Creon's son. Such an attachment is barely hinted at in Sophocles' *Antigone*, is developed at greater length in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, and in Statius. May's treatment of it, however, is based less upon these than upon the "star-crossed" lovers of innumerable romantic plays of his own time. And for the conclusion of the affair he seems to have gone directly to *Romeo and Juliet*. In Sophocles, it will be remembered, Antigone comes to her end through self-strangulation in the tomb in which she has been walled up. In May's play, however, she takes poison, and dies just as she is about to be rescued by Haemon; the latter, overcome by grief, takes his own life.

It must not be thought, however, that May's *Antigone* is a mere hodge-podge of material gathered from a number of sources and thrown loosely together. To make such a criticism of it would be as unjust in the case of May as in that of any other playwright of an age which felt itself under no compulsion to invent stories when inexhaustible mines lay open on every side. Moreover, the threads of May's story are so bound together as to form a consistent whole: the sub-plots (if the term may be used) of the love affair between Haemon and Antigone, and of Argia's search for her husband's body, are skilfully woven

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[45] Compare *Antigone*, Sg. C7^{v}-D3^{r}, and the 1635 Lucan, SgK7^{r}-L1^{r}. It would be interesting to know the exact relationship between these and a scene in Act III of Goffe's *Orestes*, in which three witches also appear. Here, however, the ghastly creatures have no spoken lines, but are used merely as scenery.

into the main theme; and the story as a whole, far from being episodic, pursues a regular course, from the first complication in Creon's inhumanity, through its climax in the pitiful meeting of Antigone and Argia, to its catastrophe in the death of the lovers and of Creon himself. In addition, it contains, like May's Roman tragedies, a number of strong scenes. Most striking are the lament of Argia for her dead lord and the wanderings of the two women over the plains of Thebes, and the really eerie consultation of Creon with the three loathly hags. Nor is the play lacking in characterization, a fact which is surprising when we consider that Greek drama, May's principal source, is not notable for the realism of its characters. To both Creon and Antigone does May succeed in giving the quality of actuality. Creon becomes, in May's treatment, a stubborn, wrong-headed egotist personally responsible for his own behavior; his refusal to give burial to the Greeks springs from an unlovely self-righteousness, and his refusal to permit the marriage of Antigone and Haemon is based upon a somewhat British unwillingness to have his son marry into a tainted family. As a result Creon is in May's play an individual human being, and not, as he is in Sophocles, according to the conventions of Greek drama, a mere instrument, neither good or evil in himself, in the hands of an overwhelming fate bent upon the destruction of the last survivor of the house of Oedipus. The character of Antigone is drawn with similar care. Perhaps because of the tragic deaths of other members of her family, she is not a girl of shy and hesitant thoughts, with no experience of the world. Instead, she is a forthright person with the wisdom of a Portia—"thou hast," declares her father, "a magazine of virtuous thoughts within thee"—although she naturally lacks Portia's wit and occasional frivolity. For all her wisdom, however, she possesses a becoming modesty; when Haemon pays her compliment she rebukes him gravely, "You come from court, and speak as that has taught you." But she is not coy, and frankly admits her love for Creon's son. Above all these characteristics, however, stands her love for her brother (which May carefully "motivates") and the calm courage with which she defies the harsh commands of Creon. The other characters, also, are portrayed as carefully as the

story demands. Haemon, to be sure, is regrettably similar to all romantic heroes; but Argia, half-frenzied throughout the play, and Eurydice, the wise mother trying to resolve the misunderstandings between her husband and her son, are considerably more than lay figures.

Because of its firmness of plot and adequacy of characterization, May's *Antigone* is a thoroughly readable play, although we must perhaps admit, with one critic, that "it is fitter for the closet than the stage."[46] But it is not for its readability that the play is chiefly interesting to the student of the drama, but rather for the fact that in it May gives final proof of the inability of the average Jacobean playwright, no matter how classical his habit of mind, to escape the romantic tendency of the age. The two elements, as we have seen, are combined in varying degrees in all of May's plays; but in none of them is the contrast so striking as in the *Antigone.* For here he was dealing with material a large part of which was derived directly from Greek drama; and here he followed the method of Greek drama more closely than did ever his master Jonson. To be sure, since May was uninhibited by the ethical objection of the Greeks to the direct representation of scenes of violence, much of the action is portrayed directly upon the stage. Beyond this, however, May retains much of the furniture of classical drama. His choruses, for example, retain the abstract quality of the Greek chorus; they do not tend, as did the choruses in the plays of the English "French Senecans," to become concrete personages. They are used, also, entirely as commentators, and May goes so far in several places as to couch their comment in a form which roughly approximates the Greek stichomythia. Moreover, like the classical dramatists, he varies the versification of his chorus passages, not by using an elaborate stanzaic form as did Garnier and his English followers, but by alternating between rimed verse and blank verse, and between four-stressed lines and five-stressed lines. This, together with the regular construction of the play, to some extent the general conception of character, the moralizing of the chorus, and the absence of any comic

[46] Halliwell-Phillipps, *Dictionary of Old English Plays.*

relief, imparts to May's play more than a little of the quality of ancient drama. Clearly, if ever an Elizabethan play was intended to be "classical," this one was.

Side by side with such classicism as this, however, there are a number of romantic elements which consort strangely with the rest of the play. Haemon's romantic attachment for Antigone, their meeting in

> unfrequented woods,
> Where nature void of artificial robes
> Presents her naked and ungarnish'd face,

the love speeches of the two, their tragic death in a tomb suspiciously like that of the Capulets in Verona—all this is strikingly unclassical. Equally in contrast with the Greek spirit is the scene, already described, in which Creon, taking the ever sorrowful road to En-dor, consults the three hags. There can be no doubt that this part of the play, despite its details derived from Roman demonology, drew inspiration from Macbeth's "secret, black, and midnight hags;" unfortunately, however, May fails to "poetize" his witches, and the scene is marked, consequently, not by "the tempestuous loveliness of terror," but by morbid horror such as is to be found in such works as Mrs. Radcliff's *Mysteries of Udolpho* or in the more recent repulsiveness of *Dracula*. However that may be, this episode, in combination with the love story mentioned above,[47] does much to counteract the classical spirit of the play in its larger aspects. The result of this strange and none too felicitous juxtaposition of the classic and the romantic is that *The Tragedy of Antigone*, in the eyes of the modern reader, partakes somewhat of the nature of a literary curiosity. It has the strangeness, not of a monstrosity like the creatures half-cat and half-rabbit of which we sometimes read, but of any art form which is a product of two separate ages. It is as if Fletcher had been set down in ancient Greece and enjoined to write in the manner of Euripedes, or as if Sophocles, mysteriously transported to Elizabethan England, had tried

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[47] These resemblances are pointed out by Professor Schelling, *op. cit.*, II 44–45.

to imitate Shakespeare. Because the play is curious, the reader is likely to forget its very real merit; and that is unfortunate, since May's *Antigone* is worthy to be read in its own right. From the point of view of the student of literature, however, the incongruity in the play is interesting, because it serves as a peg upon which to hang the observation on the conflict between classicism and romanticism which must be the final comment on May's position in the history of the drama.

There remain still to be discussed the style of these tragedies and the merit of their poetic achievement. In the preceding chapter, reference was made to the fact that May was master of an entirely adequate blank verse; and the fact seems worth repeating here, since the persistent reader of old plays becomes increasingly aware of the degeneration with respect to verse which marked many minor playwrights in the declining years of the age of the drama. May's blank verse, although far removed from Marlowe's "mighty line," is not much inferior to the best of his day; and it is far superior to that of the host of small playwrights who merely divided pompous prose into arbitrary lines. Apart from versification, the most conspicuous feature of May's style is its simplicity and lack of imagery. This may be—no doubt is—a sign that May lacked poetic genius; on the other hand, we must bear in mind the possible influence exerted by classical studies upon his manner of writing. More than once he declares his admiration for the unadorned style. He speaks of Caesar's *Commentaries* as having

> A style so strong, naked and beautiful,
> Free from affected words, and from all gloss
> Or dress of oratory, as instead
> Of leading others in a way to write,
> It quite discourages the ablest men.[48]

Elsewhere he asserts that true beauty is that "which is set off with the least witchery of attire."[49] There can be no doubt that this Attic simplicity was the ideal of writing towards which

[48] *Julia Agrippina*, Sg. A IIv.
[49] *History of Parliament*, II, 62.

May strove; if he did not achieve a style which "quite discourages the ablest men," he did nevertheless find a style of his own which is markedly free from both adornment and eccentricity. The result of such a manner is of course not what we consider fine poetry. The reader will search May's plays in vain for the flashing word or the inspired figure which "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art." He will find instead the verse of a skilful craftsman, and language which, if it never reaches the rarefied heights of poetry, at least is consistently dignified and upon occasion eloquent. One passage from *Julia Agrippina* will serve to illustrate these points. Narcissus, who has played a losing game in casting his lot against Agrippina, is speaking:

> I have already cast mine own poor life
> Into the utmost hazard: but alas!
> That is a thing not now considerable.
> The Gods above can tell how willingly
> For Caesar's safety I would sacrifice
> This life; make me the chiefest instrument,
> Impose what part of this exploit you please
> Upon Narcissus' hand, and if I fail
> To execute; I'll not refuse to die.[50]

These lines are quoted, not because they are by any means representive of May at his best, but because they give a just idea of the general level of his style both in the Roman tragedies and in *Antigone.*

What has been said of May's style applies equally to the tragedies in their larger aspects. Lacking brilliance or even cleverness, they are nevertheless good, solid plays, with both effectiveness of story and adequacy of characterization. They reveal also a wise sanity towards the commonplace relationships of life which sets them apart from many of the tragedies of the declining years of the drama, and makes them one in spirit, if not in achievement, with their great predecessors. To be sure, May did not, perhaps could not, plumb the depths of the soul or probe into the darker places of the heart; he therefore lacks

[50] Sg. B11^{v}-B12^{r}.

the power of Shakespeare, Fletcher, Massinger, or even Ford, to stir us with a sense of beauty or terror or pity or exultation. Since he can do none of these things, and since he wrote in a great age which produced more than a few writers of tragedy who could do all of them, it is not likely that his plays will claim the attention of the reader who wishes to sample only that which is best in the Elizabethan drama. But May's tragedies are well worth the perusal of the close student who wishes to understand that drama in its entirety, and to whom, therefore, no minor eddy in its stream is unimportant. To such a student, *Cleopatra*, *Julia Agrippina*, and *Antigone* are of interest because in them are curiously and revealingly combined those qualities which spring from influences which no Jacobean or Caroline dramatist entirely escaped—the influence on the one hand of Jonson, on the other of Shakespeare and Fletcher.

VI

Translations

It is a commonplace that translations, except when they are made by poets of established reputation, are not likely to achieve enduring fame either for themselves as monuments of literature or for their authors as pre-eminent men of letters. Chapman and Pope are, of course, notable exceptions to the rule, the general truth of which is amply supported by the history of translation in the early seventeenth century. The student of literature, were he asked to name the translators of that period, would certainly name Jonson and Chapman; but only the specialist would recall Sandys, Fanshawe, Holiday, or May, all of whom in their own day enjoyed considerable reputations in this field. Not even the specialist, unless he had read up on the subject for a purpose, would recognize the names of the scholars and small poets—Bingham, Barnes, Stapleton, and Anthony Wotton, for example—who made translations from the classics, some of which went through more than one edition during the lifetime of their authors.

And yet, though obscurity was the reward of the labor, to the seventeenth century, an age in which, under the impulse set in motion by Jonson, one of the chief critical problems was the relation of the classics to modern literature, the task of translation seemed one of the greatest importance. The authoritative history of English translation, when it is written, will accord a large and important place to that century of manifold and conflicting interests as one of the major periods in the development of the translator's art, with respect not only to the quality but also to the number of the translations from the classics. And such a history, if it professes to be comprehensive, will not confine itself to the major translators of the time—Jonson and Chapman at the beginning of the century, Dryden at the beginning of the next epoch. It must include also the many small figures who, laboring in the shadow of these giants, endeavored, with varying degress of success, to transplant for the

benefit of English readers the choicest flowers of classical literature. The extent of this activity, not yet fully recognized, may perhaps be suggested by the fact that in the first half of the century, which, like the Elizabethan epoch, is generally supposed to have had little interest in Greek literature as compared to Latin, the works of no less than twenty-five Greek writers found their way into English translations. The number of Latin authors was, of course, much greater. It must not be supposed, however, that this interest in the classics was in any way historic or scientific. Every translator, from men like Jonson and Dryden down to the dustiest of schoolmen, was concerned, not with helping the English reader to an understanding of ancient thought or manners or modes of poetic expression, but with the creation of a new work of art, which could be enjoyed in its own right, without reference to its historical significance.[1]

Among the translators of the first half of the century, no writer, Jonson and Chapman excepted, gained greater esteem, either from contemporaries or from later historians of literature, than Thomas May. His contemporaries—among them no less a person than Ben Jonson—showered upon his translations applause of a sort which they never vouchsafed to his plays; as we have already seen, it was as a translator alone that he was honored by mention in Suckling's "A Session of the Poets." When May turned to translation after the failure of his plays, he did so without any feeling that he was attaching himself to an inferior form of literary endeavor. Although in 1642 James Howell, who later was to become Historiographer to Charles II, condemned translation as servile,[2] and many before and after have agreed with him, May stoutly defended the art:

> Translation be a thing which, I think, the ablest men do not at all condemn. Some men there are who complain of late that too much learning is brought into our native language, and that that is by others obtained at too

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[1] For a discussion of the critical attitude of the age towards translation, see J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols., Oxford, 1908, Introduction, I, xlviii-lviii, to which, and the essays there collected, I am greatly indebted.

[2] *Familiar Letters* (ed. Oliphant Smeaton). Temple Classics, 3 vols., London, 1903, III, 41–42.

easy a rate, which cost themselves more labour. Those (as I take it) are such pretty scholars as have rather strived to get some skill in the Latin or Greek tongues, than to furnish themselves with the substance of art, which is contained in those tongues; and wanting so much real learning as may condemn them to the world, would fain be applauded for the shadow of it: Like some unlearned or injudicious preachers in country parishes, who would rather be liked by the ignorant people for speaking of Latin sentences, than informing their knowledges with substantial doctrine, and have the fortune to be praised by none, but those which do not understand them: and indeed those which I have observed mis-likers of translations, are neither perfect in the Latin, nor able in their native language.[3]

In so far as May had any theory of translation, it is contained in this passage. He believed that translation was a worthy endeavor, and, like his age, he believed that its purpose was to furnish the reader with the "substance of art."

A translation of Lucan was the first of May's ventures in composition of this kind to reach the press. *Lucan's Pharsalia, or The Civill Warres of Rome, betweene Pompey the Great, and Iulius Caesar. The three first bookes. Translated into English by T. M.* appeared in 1626, and was followed in the next year by a translation of the whole ten books.[4] May was not the first English poet whose attention had been engaged by Lucan's historical poem. George Turberville, more than half a century before, had planned to translate the *Pharsalia;* but Melpomene, appearing to him, he says, in a dream, had warned him not to do so, lest, like Phaeton, he suffer the fate of those who drive their chariots too near the sun. The muse had said in part:

> Let lofty Lucan's verse alone,
> a deed of deep device:
> A stately style, a peerless pen,
> a work of weighty price.
> More meet for noble Buckhurst's brain,
> where Pallas built her bower,
> Of purpose there to lodge herself
> and show her princely power.
> His swelling vein would better please

[3] *Selected Epigrams of Martiall*, 1629, "Epistle to the Reader," Sg. A6^{v}–A7^{v}.
[4] See Bibliography, p. 190.

those royal Roman peers,
Than any one in Brutus' land
that liv'd these many years.

. . . . . .

All which I speak to let thee wit,
that though thou have some skill,
Yet hast thou not sufficient stuff
this author's loom to fill.

. . . . . .

So thou, unless thou take good heed,
translating Lucan's war,
Shall spoil thy lute, and 'stroy thy strings
in straining them too far.[5]

And Turberville had modestly resigned the task, in accordance with Melpomene's advice, in favor of the nobler author of the Induction to the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Sackville, however, did not take the hint; and Marlowe's version of the first book, which appeared with *Hero and Leander* in a quarto of 1600,[6] was the first published English translation of the *Pharsalia*. In 1614, a complete translation, in wretched four-stress rimed couplets, was published by Sir Arthur Gorges, the Alcyon of Spenser's *Daphnaida* and one of the figures in *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*.

Despite the praise of Turberville, however, and the fact that no less a person than Marlowe had partially translated the *Pharsalia*, English critics of the seventeenth century held Lucan in small esteem. As a matter of fact, it had been the fashion, ever since the time of Quintilian, to depreciate Lucan's poetical merits, although Martial, in an epigram on "Lucanus"—

Sunt quidam qui me dicant non esse poetam
Sed qui me vendit bybliopola putat—

implies that he enjoyed popular if not critical favor. To the common objection that Lucan was no poet, Julius Caesar Scaliger had replied that

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[5] George Tuberville, *Tragicall Tales, and Other Poems*. Reprinted, 1837, pp. 9–19.

[6] *Lucan's First Booke Translated Line For Line, by Chr. Marlow*, London, 1600.

> It is beyond all dispute that Lucan was a poet; and . . . the grammarians do but trifle (as they commonly do) when they object, and say that he wrote not a poem, but a history,[7]

but not even the weight of the distinguished schoolman's opinion was sufficient to attract critical approbation to the Roman poet-historian. Ben Jonson believed that

> Lucan, taken in part, was good divided; read altogether, merited not the name of poet.[8]

In the next age, Fuller and Dryden were of much the same opinion.

May, however, did not share the common attitude towards Lucan. In the dedication to the Earl of Devonshire he wrote:

> The matter of this work is a true history adorned and heightened with poetical raptures, which do not adulterate nor corrupt the truth, but give it a more sweet and pleasant relish. The history of it is the greatest of histories, the affairs of Rome . . . The blood of her valiant citizens, and the conquests and triumphs of so many ages had raised her now to that unhappy height, in which she could neither retain her freedom without great troubles nor fall into a monarchy but most heavy and distasteful. . . . The author of it [the poem] was a noble Roman, rich in his mind as his large fortunes, of whose happy conceits and high raptures I forbear to dispute . . .[9]

From these words it is clear that May admired Lucan as much for his patriotism as for his poetry, and this conclusion is supported by the verses with which May prefaced his translation:

> This dying figure that rare Lucan shows,
> Whose lofty genius great Apollo chose
> When Roman liberty oppress'd should die,
> To sing her sad and solemn obsequy
> In stately numbers, high as Rome was great;

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[7] *Poetices, lib. I, cap. XI.*

[8] *Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden* (in Gifford and Cunningham's *Works of Ben Jonson*, IX, 370).

[9] Sg. A2^{r}-A4^{v}, in the edition of 1627.

> And not so much to years indebted yet,
> As thou, fam'd Maro, when thy infant verse
> The gnats' low funeral did first rehearse.
> Thy favor'd muse did find a different fate:
> Thou gott'st Augustus' love, he Nero's hate;
> But was an act more great and high to move
> A Prince's envy, than a Prince's love.[10]

Although the modern reader is not likely to share the translator's enthusiasm for the *Pharsalia*, May's confidence at least in the popular appeal of the work was justified: new editions appeared in 1631, 1635 and 1650; and in 1659, nine years after the author's death, another edition was published in conjunction with a new edition of May's original continuation of Lucan's narrative. Although these were publisher's reprints of the edition of 1627 and it is probable that May did not share in any profits which may have been derived from their sale, it is clear that, except for the *Continuation*, May's translation of the *Pharsalia* was the most popular of his works.

Certainly it drew the acclaim of his friends. Ben Jonson, in verses addressed to "my chosen friend, the learned translator of Lucan," extolled the merits of both the Latin poet (somewhat inconsistently, it would seem, if Drummond reported Jonson's private opinion correctly) and of May's translation:

> When, Rome, I read thee in thy mighty pair,
> And see both climbing up the slippery stair
> Of Fortune's wheel by Lucan driv'n about,
> And the world in it, I begin to doubt,
> At every line some pin thereof should slack
> At least, if not the general engine crack.
> But when again I view the parts so piec'd
> And those in number so, and measure rais'd
> As neither Pompey's popularity,
> Caesar's ambition, Cato's liberty,
> Calm Brutus' tenor start; but all along
> Keep due proportion in the ample song,
> It makes me ravish'd with just wonder, cry

[10] Sg. A1^{v}, ed. 1627.

What muse, or rather god of harmony
Taught Lucan these true moods! Replies my sense,
What gods but those of arts and eloquence,
Phoebus and Hermes? They whose tongue or pen
Are still th' interpreters twixt gods and men.
But who hath them interpreted, and brought
Lucan's whole frame unto us, and so wrought,
As not the smallest joint, or gentlest word
In the great mass or machine there is stirr'd?
The self-same Genius! So the work will say,
The Sun translated, or the Son of May.[11]

One H. V. was equally congratulatory:

Pompey and Caesar, worthies more than men,
Are more than worthy of a lasting story
And worthy more than of a vulgar pen
To raise the trophies of deserved glory.
Who now is fit but May, as Lucan then?
Change but the language and the sooth to say,
May is their Lucan, and their Lucan May.
Forward sweet friend, led by rich Lucan's vein,
Nor is thy praise the less, but more thy pain.[12]

May's friend John Vaughan was enraptured at hearing Lucan's numbers "languaged like my infancy" and suggested that England might now dispute with Rome for the honor of numbering Lucan among her poets:

Rome had been still my wonder: I had known
Lucan, in no expression but his own:
And had as yet conjectur'd it a wrong,
To have prais'd Caesar in another tongue.
To bring forth one, that could but understand,
I thought a pride too great for any land,
Yea, for Romes self. Who would be pos'd to tell
How great she was, when she could write so well.
Till truth was nearer brought by thee: till I

[11] Sg. A8^{r}, edition of 1635.
[12] Verses in the edition of 1627, Sg. A7^{v}.

Found Lucan languag'd like my infancy.
Till Rome was met in England in that state,
That was, at once, her greatnesse, and her fate;
So, all to us discover'd that nought's hid
Which either she could speake, or Caesar did.
Beyond which, nothing can be done by thee,
Though thou had'st more of Lucan, than we see
Reveal'd in this: wherein there is so much
Of miracle, that I durst doubt him such
As thou has render'd him. But that I knew
'Tis cross to be thy friend and Lucan's foe.
Whom thou hast made so much thyself, that we
May almost strive about his pedigree,
Since Rome hath nothing left to prove him hers
But the foul instance of his murtherers.
So neatly hast thou robb'd her of his name,
That she can only rescue't with a shame,
Which may she do: whilst nations reckon thee
Lucan in all, except Rome's infamy.[13]

Another friend, Sir Richard Fanshawe, celebrated the merits of the translation in ponderous Latin verses, "Maius Lucanizans," which are too long to quote here;[14] while George Daniel exclaimed:

Be glad, illiterate English, that ye may,
Hear Lucan, in your best of language speak.[15]

A contemporary wit made the inevitable pun:

The April of all poesy—Tom May,
Who makes our English speak Pharsalia.[16]

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[13] Edition of 1635, Sg. A8v.

[14] *Il Pastor Fido, The Faithfull Shephard . . . with an Addition of divers other Poems.* London, 1648, 4°. 248–9.

[15] *Poems of George Daniel*, ed. A. Grosart, 4 vols., privately printed, 1878. I, 30.

[16] *Choyce Drollery*, 1656 (ed. J. W. Ebsworth, Boston, Lincolnshire, 1876. 5–6). I have quoted the lines, however, from the version of the poem found in MS. Ashmole 38 (reprinted by J. J. Parry in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XIX; 270–277), which is somewhat fuller than the version in the volume of 1656. In the manuscript, the verses are attributed to John Heming, the son of Shakespeare's associate.

The next generation, however, was of mixed opinion concerning the merits of May's translation. Master Thomas Browne, writing in 1667 to his father, the celebrated Sir Thomas, speaks with enthusiasm of having read Lucan in the original and believes "the translation by May will come short of it."[17] Dr. James Welwood, in a preface to Rowe's translation of the same work wrote:

> I know May has translated it [the *Pharsalia*] near an age ago, and I confess it is many years since I read it. But it must be own'd, that it's but a lame performance, and does not reach the spirit or sense of Lucan. The language and versification are yet worse, and fall infinitely short of the lofty numbers and propriety of expression in which Mr. Rowe excels.[18]

Dr. Welwood, it is to be suspected, was a not impartial critic. Rowe's "lofty numbers" were, of course, nothing more than heroic couplets; and later critics have deemed the translations of May and Rowe to be of nearly equal merit. It is interesting, in this connection, to note that a worn copy of May's translation had a place in the library of Tate's successor in the laureateship.[19]

With the popular success of his first translation as an incentive, May produced in rapid succession two more Englishings of his beloved classics. *Virgil's Georgics, Englished by Thomas May*, appeared in 1628, to be followed in the next year by the *Selected Epigrams of Martiall*. It is only fair to such a thorough-going classicist as May to believe that in translating these fine old poets he was in part indulging his personal predilection, but it is equally fair, since he was a professional poet and, like his age, looked upon translation from an absolute rather than an historical point of view, to suppose that his translations were also designed to satisfy what he believed to be established tastes in pastoral and epigrammatic poetry.

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[17] Sir Thomas Browne, *Works* (ed. Simon Wilkins), 4 vols., London, 1836. I, 142–144.

[18] Nicholas Rowe, *Lucan's Pharsalia, Translated into English Verse*, London, 1718. [Preface by Jas. Welwood, M.D., p. xxii.]

[19] *A Catalogue of the Library of Nicholas Rowe, Esquire, Deceas'd, Late Poet Laureate to His Majesty*, London, 1719. p. 16, item 402.

If the latter element affected his choice of subject, we must conclude that May had little aptitude for calculating his work to the meridian of popular demand, and that his translations, like his plays, would have appealed more strongly to the readers of two decades before than to his own contemporaries. Certainly, his translation of the *Georgics* had little chance of securing general favor. Although pastoral drama had retained its popularity, particularly at Court, far into the reign of Charles, the vogue of other forms of pastoral poetry had subsided after its recrudescence, during the second decade of the century, at the hands of Wither, William Browne and others of the "school of Spenser;" and later pastorals, like *Lycidas*, were more likely to reflect current events under thinly veiled allegory. Moreover, pastoralism in England, while it had leaned heavily on Vergil and Mantuanus, had always had a large admixture of native folk-elements (as even in *The Sad Shepherd* of that arch-classicist Jonson) which had contributed more than its proportionate share to the popularity of poetry of this kind. Consequently the unadulterated classicism of the *Georgics*, together with the fact that they lacked the dramatic interest and the ever-popular satire on court and city which caused the eclogue to flourish, was little likely to endear to English readers Vergil's idyllic account of the purely agricultural life and craft. Perhaps these considerations sufficiently explain why, despite the popularity, coeval with the Renaissance itself, of the *Aeneid* and the *Bucolics*, the *Georgics* had not found an English translator before May;[20] and why his translation, while it evoked critical applause as late as the eighteenth century, failed to capture the attention of the reading public it was intended for.

In electing to translate Martial, May displayed a somewhat keener sagacity. The literary epigram, as practiced by Martial, had come into its own slowly. The rough and often extended satire of the epigrams of old John Heywood and his immediate successors shows little similarity to the suave brevity of the

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[20] Professor Greg (*Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama*, London, 1906, p. 79) mentions a translation of the year 1589 by Abraham Fleming; but there is no mention of this work either in the catalogue of the British Museum or in Pollard's *Short-Title Catalogue*.

Roman wit. Even the Jacobean epigrammatists, although they had for example the work of such men as Sir John Davies and Sir John Harington, both of whom had fashioned their epigrams on the Martialan pattern, were for the most part clumsy, diffuse, lacking in brilliance. It was Ben Jonson who, by praising and imitating Martial, permanently set the English epigram in the classical mould; and it is probable that May's translation was intended to meet a popular demand for epigrams in the Jonsonian manner.[21] But once more, it is to be feared, May miscalculated the public taste. While adopting the classical form, Jonson had made the epigram thoroughly English in subject; and Martial's allusions to Roman life were of little interest to English readers who had learned to laugh over satiric comments on an English court, English gulls and cuckolds, English bear-baiting and theatrical performances, and who had not the skill to comprehend the universality of the Latin poet's satire.

Here again, however, as in the case of the *Georgics*, May was a pioneer with respect to avowed translation. Although Martial had been partially translated by Timothy Kendall (*Flowers of Epigrammes*, 1577), his versions were inaccurate, full of omissions and distortions, and part of a larger work; and later writers, like Harington and Weever (*Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut and Newest Fashion*, 1599), had adapted rather than translated. Francis Davison, in the *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602), had published translations of thirteen of the epigrams, and Jonson had translated one or two.[22] May's translation, however, was the first to be published as such, and has to that extent at least an historical interest.[23]

Forced to be content with the financially unprofitable satisfaction of having made two Latin classics available for the first time

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[21] This supposition is borne out by the fact that May, in the Epistle to the Reader, states that he had made the translations long before, without intent to publish.

[22] Concerning these translations, see T. K. Whipple, *Martial and the English Epigram*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. X, 1920–25, pp. 279–414.

[23] A translation made in Elizabeth's time exists only in manuscript. The next published translation after May's was that of R. Fletcher, 1656.

to those who had "small Latin," May turned to a mine one vein of which had already been worked with profit. As early as 1625 he had translated the verses for Kingsmill Long's English version of the *Argenis*, John Barclay's allegorical-political romance; and he had seen another translation, by Captain Robert Le Grys, which also contained his verses,[24] go through two editions in as many years (1628 and 1629). Inspired, no doubt, with the success of this work, May published, in 1631, a translation of Barclay's *Icon Animorum*, under the title of *The Mirrour of Mindes*. John Barclay, as a modern biographer remarks,[25] was one of those unfortunate authors who, hoping to secure permanent and universal fame for their works by writing them in Latin, have by that act doomed themselves to obscurity in an increasingly ignorant world. Born in France in 1582, of a Scottish father and a French mother, Barclay became a peripatetic scholar and author, spending part of his young manhood in England at the Court of James I, and his later life (he died at 39) under the Pope's patronage at Rome. His *Argenis* went through numerous editions, as did the English translations of that work already mentioned and translations in the other principal languages of Europe; besides being a favorite book of such widely separated men as Richelieu and Rousseau, Cowper and Coleridge, it exerted a considerable influence, not yet fully estimated, on later fiction. The *Argenis* is in the direct line of descent from the Greek novel, and in spite of the tiresome political allegory and the involutions and convolutions of the plot, tells a story not more tiresome than those in similar romances.

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[24] Among the State Papers there is preserved a letter from Captain Le Grys to Philip Earl of Montgomery, the Lord Chamberlain, in which these verses of May's are mentioned. The Earl, by the King's command, had ordered Le Grys to print his translation of the *Argenis*, and Le Grys, ready for the press, awaited specific license to print. Meanwhile, Mr. Mayne, of the Stationers' Company, had suggested that the book would be more vendible if those who had a mind to read the verses should find them in it. Le Grys therefore desired that His Majesty should command him to insert the verses which were joined to a translation already published [Kingsmill Long's]; "they were rendered into English by Mr. Thomas May, and not by him that set out the book." The King's consent to this addition was readily granted. (*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1627-27. Series 2, vol, 2, 585, 589.) The verses themselves, since they form an insignificant part of the whole work, need not detain us.

[25] K. N. Colville, *Fame's Twilight*, London, 1923. 127–157.

Even more interesting is Barclay's *Euphormionis Satyricon*, written in three parts which were published in 1603, 1607, and 1610 respectively. The first part of this work may be considered on the whole a picaresque novel of real life, although there is an admixture of allegory in the string of realistic adventures. The *Icon Animorum*, although it bears no intrinsic relation to the *Euphormio*, was published in 1614 as Part IV of that work. May's translation of the *Icon Animorum* is the only part of the larger work which has found its way into English.

It is to be regretted that May did not choose to translate the more entertaining first part of the *Euphormio*, rather than the last. The *Icon Animorum*, however, is by no means uninteresting. Beginning with an introductory chapter, treating of the four ages of man, which contains some sound advice on the rearing of children, the major portion of the work is devoted to an analysis of the peoples of Europe and to some degree their histories. As one who was, as the learned Grotius phrased it, "*Gente Caledonius, Gallus natalibus*," Barclay was not unnaturally partial towards France and Scotland. The bravery, loyalty, hospitality, and humanity of the country of his birth are tainted only by the wildness of its young men and a certain contentiousness which finds an outlet in the madness of the tournament. As for Scotland, it is the home of all virtue, including love of learning and an immoderate curiosity concerning pedigrees; such minor flaws as poverty and clan warfare have been repaired by the wise providence of James Stuart. The natives of perfidious Albion, on the other hand, are scarcely worthy of either their prosperity or the beauty of their countryside. Although the English are good sea-farers, they are bad traders. The nobles are arrogant, and the workers spend more time in taverns than is consistent with superior handicraft. The nation to a man is disputatious in matters of theology (this from a Scotsman!); and hostile to foreigners, although if the latter but assume the appearance of belligerency the Englishman will quickly change his tone. As for the Irish, those unloved stepchildren of the kingdom, they are dirty, slothful, unambitious. More impartial is Barclay's account of the rest of Europe. The Germans, although slow of wit, have all the solid virtues—

modesty, simplicity, loftiness of mind; their excessive drinking—an antidote to the poisonous air of rooms heated by stoves—far from being offensive, since it does not result in idleness, is really a form of urbanity. The scholars, however, less anxious to learn than to teach, suffer from a perverted *cacoethes scribendi*, and value their reputations by the number and size of their printed books! Italians are the brilliant but treacherous heirs of a magnificent past; hemlock and honey are mixed in their blood. Spaniards, their great day past, have permitted their dignity to degenerate into boastfulness. After some random remarks on the wildness of the Pole, the servility of the Russian, the unspeakableness of the Turk, the first part of the work closes with some words of concentrated virulence against the Jew. All this, the contents of the first nine chapters, is entertaining, with its fresh concreteness and its suggestion of the permanence of national prejudice. The remaining six chapters are less interesting because less specific: after analyzing minds of various types—the quick but shallow, the fluent but rhetorical, the slow but able, the valiant, the rash, the fearful, the proud, the sordid, the amorous,—Barclay concludes with a homily on the folly of courts and the vanity of riches, and an exhortation to judges to mend their ways.

The translation of this curious work, with its points of resemblance to the book of "characters" at one extreme and the compendium of universal history at the other, was May's last essay in the form of literary activity which had brought fame to North and Chapman. Although the translation was less successful than that of the *Pharsalia*, May had the satisfaction, in 1633, of seeing it go through a second edition. But he must have deplored the public taste which preferred such a work to the classic beauties of Vergil or the pungent wit of Martial.

A critical appraisal of May's translations must be conditioned by a consideration of the pervasive influence of Ben Jonson upon all the work of his "friend in judgment and choice." In the first half of the century, there were still two schools of thought with respect to translations. The older, kept alive by the influence of Jonson, held that the function of the translator was to follow his original as closely as possible; the other, of which

Chapman was the chief practitioner, believed that free paraphrase was the only method whereby poetry in one language could be preserved as poetry in another. Many of the most distinguished of the Jacobean and Caroline translators followed the teaching of their master Ben; and as late as 1650 Marvell stigmatized as "translation's thief" the writer who dared to tamper with his original. But almost at the same time James Howell was writing that

> the greatest fidelity that can be expected of a translator is to keep still afoot and entire the true genuine sense of the author with the main design he drives at . . .[26]

and John Denham, to whom credit is usually given for beginning the mode which became universal in the next age, was insisting that it is

> a vulgar error in translating poets to affect being *fidus interpres*. Let that care be with them who deal in matters of fact or matters of faith; but whosoever aims at it in poetry, as he attempts at what is not required, so shall he never perform what he attempts; for it is not his business alone to translate language into language, but poesie into poesie; and poesie is of so subtle a spirit, that in pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit is not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *caput mortuum*.[27]

The period immediately preceding the Restoration acclaimed Cowley's imitations of Pindar as marking a new epoch in the art of translation; and when, later, all the force of Dryden's authority was added to the arguments of those who advocated paraphrase and free imitation of the classics, the older school fell into disesteem.

Although it would be an impertinence for the present writer to pass on the merits of this age-old discussion, permission may be granted to Dr. Johnson to state the issues and to place May with respect to his fellow translators:

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[26] *Op. cit.*, III, 41–42.
[27] Preface to the second book of the *Aeneid*.

But the old practice [of Caxton] was not suddenly forsaken; Holland filled the nation with literal translation; and what is yet more strange, the same exactness was obstinately practised in the versions of the poets. This absurd labor of construing into rhyme was countenanced by Jonson in his version of Horace; and whether it be that more men have learning than genius, or that the endeavours of that time were more directed to knowledge than delight, the accuracy of Jonson found more imitators than the elegance of Fairfax; and *May*, Sandys and Holiday confined themselves to the toil of rendering line for line, not indeed with equal felicity, for *May* and Sandys were Poets, and Holiday only a scholar and critic. . . .

In the general emulation of wit and genius which the festivity of the Restoration produced, the poets shook off their constraint, and considered translation as no longer confined to servile closeness. . . . The writers of the foregoing age had at least learning equal to their genius, and being often more able to explain the sentiments or illustrate the allusions of the ancients, than to exhibit their graces and transfuse their spirit, were perhaps willing sometimes to conceal their want of poetry by profusion of literature, and therefore translated literally, that their fidelity might shelter their insipidity or harshness. The wits of Charles's time had seldom more than slight or superficial views, and their care was to hide their want of learning behind the colours of a gay imagination; they therefore translated always with freedom, sometimes with licentiousness, and perhaps expected that their readers should accept spriteliness for knowledge, and consider ignorance and mistake as the impatience and negligence of a mind too rapid to stop at difficulties, and too elevated to descend to minuteness. . . .

There is undoubtedly a mean to be observed . . . he therefore will deserve the highest praise who can give a representation at once faithful and pleasing, who can convey the same thoughts with the same graces, and who when he translates changes nothing but the language.[28]

All this is well said. Both metaphrase and paraphrase have their virtues and their defects. The ideal union of freedom and accuracy is rarely achieved, and then only by a writer who is at once a scholar and a fine poet.

It is not surprising that May should have followed the teaching of his master Ben in the art of translation, just as he had emulated Jonson in the construction of plays. May's translations follow their originals line for line, with scrupulous fidelity. In his

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[28] *The Idler*, No. 69. The italics in the quotation are mine.

scholarly adherence to his authors, modern critics would find much to deplore, since the recent and entirely proper tendency is to praise those translations which successfully combine artistic merit with reasonable accuracy. But since May *was* a poet, as Dr. Johnson points out, his translations are not the least among the metaphrases of the period; they have several virtues which elevate them above the commonplace products of a Holiday or even a Sandys. The first of these merits is the dexterity with which they achieved that very result which the later age derogated—a line-for-line translation. It is no small ability, as every schoolboy used to know, to render literally the succinctness of Latin into English without a consequent diffuseness. This ability to be literal without verbosity May possessed to the full. Closely allied, and contributing to it, was his happy facility in avoiding excessive Latinity, and in achieving in its stead an easy English idiom which makes his translations appear at first glance more free than they actually are. It was this quality for which Denham praised Fanshawe's translation of Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, as being the first of its kind in English; it is only fair to point out that in this respect May anticipated his friend.

A passage from the translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* will illustrate these points. After describing Caesar's attack on Ariminum, Lucan causes that unhappy city thus to bewail its fate:

> O male vicinis haec moenia condita Gallis
> O tristi damnata loco! Pax alta per omnes,
> Et tranquilla quies populos: nos praeda furentum,
> Primaque castra sumus. Melius, Fortuna, dedisses
> Orbe sub Eoo sedem, gelidaque sub Arcto,
> Errantesque domos, Latii quam claustra tueri.
> Nos primi Senonum motus, Cimbrumque ruentum
> Vidimus, et Martem Libyes, cursumque furoris
> Teutonici. Quotiens Romam Fortuna lacessit,
> Hac iter est bellis.[29]

May translates this passage with considerable felicity:

[29] *Pharsalia*, Book I, ll. 249–257.

> Oh ill built city too too near the Gaul,
> Oh sadly situated place; when all
> The world have peace, we are the spoil of war,
> And first that are invaded: happier far
> Might we have liv'd in farthest North, or East,
> Or wand'ring tents of Scythia, than possest
> The edge of Italy. This town of ours
> First felt the furious Gauls, and Cimbrian powers,
> Hither the Libyans first, and Germans come,
> This is war's way, when Fortune threatens Rome.[30]

These lines, to be sure, are not poetry, but neither are they poetry in the original. They are, however, a good translation. They follow the original closely, ten lines for ten lines; but at the same time May avoids the pitfall of rendering the first line too accurately, with its un-English synecdoche ,and in the third line he avoids what would be the absurdity of translating *furentum* as "of those thus frenzied." These lines are fairly characteristic of May's translations as a whole: they are as terse as their originals; they are literal; and at the same time they are sufficiently free to be idiomatic and natural.[31]

It must be confessed, however, with due allowance for the inequalities of individual genius, that May's reasonably literal translations never rise to the poetic eminence of Chapman's Homer or those magnificent passages in North's Plutarch which not even Shakespeare could improve. Testifying to this point in that curious book *The Poetical Decameron*, Collier[32] contrasts

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[30] *Pharsalia*, Bk. I, Sg. A5[r]

[31] It may be instructive to compare May's translation of this passage with the infelicities of a really literal prose translation: "O walls ill founded, *these*, with the Gauls for their neighbours! O *walls* condemned to a hapless site! Profound peace and tranquil repose is there throughout all nations, we are the prey and the first encampment for *these thus* frenzied. Far better, Fortune, wouldst thou have afforded an abode in an eastern clime, and under the icy north, and wandering abodes, rather than to have to protect the threshold of Latium. We were the first to behold the commotions of the Senones, the Cimbrian, too, rushing on, and the hosts of Libya, and the career of the Teutonic rage. As oft as Fortune aims a blow at Rome, this is the passage for the warfare." (Translation by H. T. Riley, London, 1890, pp. 14–15). May's translation has the merit, at least, of being written in the English language.

[32] J. P. Collier, *The Poetical Decameron*, 2 vols., London, 1829. I, 129–131 The original is in the *Pharsalia*, Book I, ll. 72–80.

a passage from Marlowe's version of Lucan with May's translation of the same lines. Marlowe's verses read:

> Confused stars shall meet, celestial fire
> Fleet on the floods, the earth shoulder the sea,
> Affording it no shore, and Phoebus wain
> Chase Phoebus, and enrag'd affect his place,
> And strive to shine by day, and full of strife
> Dissolve the engines of the broken world.

May renders the passage thus:

> In their old Chaos, seas with skies shall join,
> And stars with stars confounded lose their shine:
> The earth no longer shall extend her shore
> To keep the ocean out: the moon no more
> Follow the sun, but scorning her old way
> Cross him, and claim the guidance of the day:
> The falling world's now jarring frame no peace,
> No league shall hold . . .

Although May's verses are perhaps not so flat as Collier thought, it must be agreed that Marlowe's translation—particularly in the phrases "the earth shoulder the sea" and "Dissolve the engines of the broken world"— is superior as poetry. On the other hand, Marlowe's lines are Lucan improved with Elizabethan daring; we might almost say, echoing Matthew Arnold's comment on Chapman's Homer, that Lucan's forthrightness had been "tormented." May's lines are superior as Lucan, if not as poetry; moreover, their real poetic merit is greater than appears when they are thrown into juxtaposition with Marlowe's "mighty line."

It is perhaps to be regretted that in his translations May did not use the blank verse which he managed fluently, if not brilliantly, in his plays. In all his verse translations, as in his non-dramatic poems, May used, as appears from the excerpts quoted above, five-stressed rimed couplets; and on the basis of these at least one eighteenth-century scholar attributed to May the invention of the heroic couplet. As a matter of fact,

the use of the rimed couplet was by no means uncommon among Jacobean and Caroline writers of verse; Sandys, Browne, Wither, Quarles, Cowley, all used it with varying degrees of success. In May's verses, however, there is little to suggest the heroic couplet, with its pause almost invariably at the end of the second line. May's measures are much more varied than those of Augustan writers; he uses the caesura with freedom, and more often than not the sense is carried from one couplet to the other and closes in various parts of the line. In the following passages, one from May's translation of Lucan and the other from Rowe's, this distinction is clearly shown. Recounting Caesar's visit to Troy, May writes:

> A little gliding stream, which Xanthus was,
> Unknown he past, and in the lofty grass
> Securely trod; a Phrygian straight forbid
> Him tread on Hector's dust: with ruins hid,
> The stone retain'd no sacred memory.[33]

Rowe treats the same passage as follows:

> Here all that does of Xanthus stream remain,
> Creeps a small brook along the dusty plain.
> While careless and securely on they pass,
> The Phrygian guide forbids to press the grass;
> This place, he said, forever sacred keep,
> For here the sacred bones of Hector sleep:
> Then warns him to observe, where rudely cast,
> Disjointed staves lay broken and defac'd.[34]

Without wishing to pass judgment on the respective merits of the versification in these two passages, it may be admitted that the former (with the main pauses after *past*, *trod*, *dust* and *memory*) shows greater freedom than the latter, and is consequently less monotonous to the ear.

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[33] May's *Lucan*, Book IX, Sg. R4v.

[34] This, with the corresponding passage from May, is quoted in A. F. Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, 3rd ed., London, 1813. 71–72.

It would be supererogatory to discuss seriatim May's translations with respect to their several merits. A personal preference might lead me to overpraise the translations of Martial, where anything but a literal rendering would certainly have destroyed the savor of the original. In May's version the epigrams lose nothing of their wit; the translator comprehended fully the characteristic Martialan turn or "snap," and preserved it intact. An example or two will demonstrate the quality of May's Englishings:

> The first love, Cinna, is to grant what I
> Request; the second quickly to deny.
> I love the one, the other hate not I;
> But thou nor grant'st, nor quickly dost deny.[35]

Another:

> That th'elephant, whose might the bull before
> So fear'd, thee (Caesar) prostrate did adore,
> 'Twas not his keeper's teaching or commands;
> Even he thy god-head, Caesar, understands.[36]

One more:

> Europe and Asia Pompey's son inter.
> He tomb'd in Lybia lies, if any-where.
> No marvel 'tis, they scatter'd thus remain,
> Since no one place such ruin could contain.[37]

Interesting too are May's variations in four-stress verse in conformity to a corresponding shortening in Martial's lines, It is to be regretted that May did not translate more of the epigrams; the Puritan tempering of his classicism, perhaps, admonished him not to stain his pages with Martial's more salacious witticisms.

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[35] Lib. 7, No. 42. Sg. F2^{r}.
[36] Spectacles, No. 17. Sg. B5^{r}.
[37] Lib. 7, No. 74. Sg. C2^{v}.

Concerning the other translations, what has been said in general is of equal specific application. Being literal, they rise and fall with their originals. The first part of the *Icon Animorum* is entertaining; so, consequently, is the first part of May's translation, in sinewy English prose. So too in the case of the *Pharsalia* and the *Georgics*. In the former, where Lucan is dull —as in the account of Caesar's maneuverings and the debates in the Senate, in Book III and IV,—so is May. Where Lucan rises to stirring narrative, or to emotional poignancy, May does not fail to rise with him; and the modern reader can still follow with interest the account of Pharsalia itself, of the fervid patriotism of Cato, of Cornelia's tender protest at being sent to the safety of Lesbos while her husband remains to face the dangers of the war. The *Georgics*, Vergil's least interesting work as to subject matter, offer little opportunity for poetic brilliance in the English translator, whose medium precludes a reproduction of Vergil's rhythmic melody. May preserves the general sweetness of their rural calm, and not infrequently manages a passage of quiet beauty, like the following:

> . . . yet rest secure, a harmless life
> Enrich'd with several blessings, free from strife—
> Cool caves, dark shady groves, and fountains clear,
> Untroubled sleeps, and cattles lowing there,
> And pleasant huntings want not; there they live
> By labour and small wealth; honour they give
> Unto their gods and parents. Justice took
> Her last step there, when she the earth forsook.[38]

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[38] Bk. II, Sg. D6r& v. It may be of interest to compare this passage with the diffuseness of Dryden's translation:

> But easy quiet, a secure retreat,
> A harmless life that knows not how to cheat,
> With home-bred plenty the rich owner bless,
> And rural pleasures crown his happiness.
> Unvex'd with quarrels, undisturb'd with noise,
> The country king his peaceful realm enjoys:
> Cool grots, and living lakes, the flow'ry pride
> Of meads, and streams that thro' the valley glide,
> And shady groves that easy sleep invite,
> And, after toilsome days, a soft repose at night.
> Wild beasts of nature in his woods abound;
> And youth of labor patient, plow the ground,

It is a compliment to the older poet, perhaps, that Dryden did not disdain to purloin more than a hundred lines from May's translation of the *Georgics*—without acknowledgment, of course, since the name of May, a Parliamentarian, was unworthy to adorn the pages of the former laureate to the Merry Monarch—when he came to render that work into English.

In the "quality which he professed" as a translator, May's work is honorable, if not distinguished. One suspects that the same scholarly habit of mind which led May to append learned notes to his Englished classics also prevented the free exercise of a poetic ability which might conceivably have produced translations of greater literary merit. On the other hand, a faithful translation which preserves the sense of the original, and at the same time avoids the pitfalls of verbosity and stylistic absurdity, is worthy of respect. In making such translations, May merely conformed to a contemporary ideal which did not survive into a later age. Since the Latin works which he rendered into English, unlike the Odyssey, have not power to arouse the wonder of a Keats or any other modern reader, and since his translations have but a modest claim to poetry in their own right, these works of May's have remained neglected, perhaps not unjustly.

Inur'd to hardship, and to homely fare.
Nor venerable age is wanting there
In great examples to the youthful train;
Nor are the gods ador'd with rites profane.
From hence Astraea took her flight; and here
The prints of her departing steps appear.
(Book II, ll. 655–672).

VII

Historical Poems

Samuel Daniel, by reason of his avowed imitation, in *The Civil Wars*, of the Roman poet-historian, has been called the "English Lucan" by the historian John Speed and by later commentators. That designation, however, might have been reserved with equal propriety for Thomas May, who, in addition to translating the *Pharsalia*, wrote a continuation, in both Latin and English, of that work; and was the author also of two historical poems on English themes—*The Reigne of King Henry the Second* and *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third*—which are obviously constructed according to Lucan's method. These works furnish the subject of this chapter. The continuation of the *Pharsalia*, since it is related in subject to a work which May had translated, might have been considered with May's translations in the preceding chapter; on the other hand, it is an original composition reflecting, as do *Henry the Second* and *Edward the Third*, the antiquarian phase of May's classicism.[1] It has seemed suitable, therefore, to consider these three works as a group.

May's interest in Roman history, as we have seen, had already found expression in his later English tragedies, as well as in his Latin play of *Julius Caesar*. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have essayed to complete Lucan's historical epic. As a disciple of Lucan's republican ideals, he must have deplored the fact that the *Pharsalia* broke off at the moment of Caesar's triumph and failed to record the downfall of the great Julius. As an historian and an admirer of the classical epic, he regretted also that the *Pharsalia* was left an inartistic fragment through Lucan's untimely death. In some verses entitled "The Complaint of Calliope against the Destinies" and prefixed to the English *Continuation*, he explicitly voiced his lament:

> Too cruel Sisters, why again am I
> Enforc'd to weep, and tax your tyranny?

[1] See below, p. 165.

Was not my Orpheus' death (though long ago)
Enough for me to bear, for you to do?
. . . . . .
No other tragedy but Lucan slain
By your untimely stroke could thus again
Revive my grief. Oh, could you not prolong
That thread awhile, until the stately song
Of his Pharsalia had been finish'd quite?
What savage bird of prey, what murd'ring kite
Could, in the midst of that melodious lay,
Ravish the charming nightingale away?
Thou sang'st no lusts, no riots, nor mad'st known
(Corrupting others' manners with thine own)
New crimes, nor with lascivious wantoning
Did'st thou defile the sacred Thesbian spring.
Thy verses teach no false adulteries,
Nor rapes committed by the deities,
Which may from guilt absolve the worst of men,
But actions great and true . . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . but woe is me,
Th' untimely stroke of death did silence thee.
Of which the grief not only us invades,
But dives into the blest Elysian shades,
Sadding the worthies there, that so did long
To fill a room in thy eternal song.
There Cato thinks (and grieves it was deni'd)
If Thou had'st liv'd, how great he should have died.
The Roman Scipio did disdain a tomb
On Libya's shore, in hope to find a room
Within thy stately poem, well content,
Save there, to have no other monument.
Those stately temples, where great Caesar's name
Shall be by Rome ador'd, wanting the fame
Which thy high lines might give, in time to come
Shall envy Pompey's small Egyptian tomb.
Had Juba's tragic fall been sung by thee
'T had eas'd the loss of his great monarchy.
But that to them and us did fate deny,
That we the more might wail thy tragedy.[2]

[2] *Continuation*, 1630 A7ʳ–A8ʳ

To rectify the blunder of the Fates, therefore, and to pacify the shades of Cato, Scipio, and Juba, May set about to complete the *Pharsalia*.

A Continuation of Lucan's Historicall Poem till the death of Julius Caesar, by Thomas May appeared in 1630. Ten years later, the *Supplementum Lucani, Libri VII. Authore Thomas May*[3] was published at Amsterdam. From these dates, it is by no means clear that May composed the work first in Latin and then translated it into English, as is commonly supposed. It is quite possible, of course, that the Latin version came first and that, while this was not immediately published, an English translation was made and printed in order to follow up the success of May's translation of the *Pharsalia*. On the other hand, the opposite method, which is suggested by the dates, seems the more likely for an Englishman who was ambitious for popular success as an author. Save the evidence of the dates, there is no way of telling what May's method was. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, his ability as a translator lay in the fact that he combined close adherence to the original with the compactness of natural English idiom. Consequently, there is no unnaturalness and no diffuseness in the *Continuation* to suggest that it is a translation. As a matter of fact, however, May was sufficiently accomplished as a Latinist to translate his own English into Latin or his own Latin into English with equal ease, and it is a matter of little importance which version came first.

In gathering data for this bi-lingual literary performance, May went to the sources which he had used in culling material for his Roman tragedies. His principal authorities were the lives of Caesar, Pompey, and Cato as told by Plutarch, and the *Roman History* of Dio Cassius. To these he added material taken from Hirtius' *Commentary on the Wars at Alexandria*, from the 17th book of Strabo's *Geography*, from the 2nd book of Appian's *Roman History*, as well as smaller details from Florus' *Epitome rerum Romanarum* and from the 15th book of Josephus. May

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[3] To simplify discussion, these works will hereafter be designated *Continuation* and *Supplementum* respectively.

follows his authorities for the most part with studious exactitude; when he is tempted to give play to his fancy, he makes careful mention of the fact in the appended notes.[4] Whatever the merits of this work as a poem, therefore, it is reasonably accurate as history at all points.

So familiar are the events recounted in May's poem that it would be presumptuous to re-tell them here. Beginning with the account of Caesar's dalliance with Cleopatra after the death of the elder Ptolemy, the story takes us rapidly through an account of the expedition against Pharnaces, Mithradates' son; the victory of Caesar over Scipio at Thapsus, and the consequent suicide of Juba and Petreius, Scipio's generals, and of Scipio himself; Cato's tragic self-destruction; Caesar's triumphs at Rome; the renewal of the war in Spain and the death of Pompey's sons at Munda; finally, Caesar's death in the Senate-house, at the hand of Brutus and his fellow conspirators. In this recital of events which were familiar to most of his contemporaries at least through Shakespeare's tragedies, May did not always avoid the pitfalls of monotony, at least from the point of view of the modern reader. The long account of the maneuverings before the battle at Thapsus is tiresome in its very nature; while the events of Books I and VI (the former dealing with Caesar and Cleopatra, the latter with Caesar's death) suffer from the inevitable comparison with greater treatments of the same themes. Frequently, however, the narrative rises to real emotional power—to the heights of rhetoric, at least, if not of poetry,—as in the speech of Cato to the youthful Pompey, and in the really stirring harangues of Caesar and Scipio to their respective armies before battle is joined at Thapsus. The events at Thapsus and Munda are well, even thrillingly told; and in the last book, although Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is constantly in the reader's mind, the arguments between Cassius and Brutus are well handled, as are the accounts of Calphurnia's dream and her pleadings with Caesar. In all of the episodes

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[4] See for example the notes to Book VI: "How truly the manner of this battle [Munda] is here expressed, or how far it may be lawful for one writing by the way of a poet to digress, I leave it to the judgment of the reader." *Continuation*, ed. 1657, p. 110.

just mentioned, May's narrative is interesting chiefly because of the addition of certain dramatic elements to the comparatively bleak accounts of the Roman chroniclers.

Most interesting of all, however, are those rare moments when May steps out of his role of historian and adds background and color from his wide classical reading. Such a passage is that in Book V, in which the triumphal festivities in Caesar's honor are described with a vividness which springs not so much from felicity of phrase as from particularity of detail. Equally entertaining is the passage in Book III[5] which discusses the language, manners, morals, and religion of elephants. Most striking of all, however, is that scene in Book III which tells of the death of Cato. Following Plutarch's hint that Cato was impelled to suicide by a reading, on the eve of his death, of Plato's *Phaedo*, May embodied in his poem a dramatic portrayal of this episode.[6] Cato is discovered reading aloud, and what he reads is May's adaptation of a passage from Plato's account of the last days of Socrates' life. This passage, unfortunately, is too long to quote here. It is worth mentioning, however, as one of the earliest English adaptations or translations of Plato;[7] and also because it appears to have furnished inspiration for part of Joseph Addison's *Cato*, the last act of which opens with a scene strikingly similar to that in May's poem.[8]

Despite these passages which are powerful or unusual, however, there is one important defect in May's sequel to the *Pharsalia* which must be mentioned. It was intended, there can be no doubt, not merely as versified history, but as a work of art

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[5] Ed. 1657, pp. 44–45.

[6] *Ibid*, pp. 66–71.

[7] F. M. K. Foster, in his *English Translations from the Greek* (Columbia University Press, 1918. 90) records no translation of the *Phaedo* earlier than 1675, and no previous translation of any of Plato's works except a version of the *Axiochus* in 1592.

[8] Compare the passage mentioned above with *Cato*, V, i, which begins with the stage direction "Cato *solus*, sitting in a thoughtful posture: in his hand Plato's Book on the Immortality of the Soul." Cato's soliloquy begins:

> It must be so—Plato, thou reason'st well —
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
> This longing after immortality.

It may be merely literary coincidence that both May and Addison should have expanded upon Plutarch's idea in this way; on the other hand, the parallelism is sufficiently close to be striking.

in the epic manner. That it falls short of this intention is due in large part to the fact that it lacks a centralized point of view. The same criticism might be made of Lucan's poem; but there a unity is achieved to some degree through the character of Pompey and even more through Lucan's moral indignation. In the sequel there is no dominant character: Scipio, Cato, and the sons of Pompey hold the stage momentarily, but none of them for long. The logical hero, of course, should have been Caesar, but May, it is apparent, had little respect for Rome's greatest soldier. Although he admired the great general's power and energy, he disapproved on moral grounds of Caesar's activities, and here he followed Lucan. Consequently, the story of the wars is not told from Caesar's side nor from any other side; and since May could scarcely *feel* these events with sufficient intensity to bind them together emotionally, the result is a work episodic and of uneven merit.

Although the student of English literature will not unnaturally be more interested in the English *Continuation* than in the Latin *Supplementum*, a word or two about the latter is necessary. It seems to have attracted the most favorable attention both in England and abroad. Prefixed to the first edition were commendatory verses in Latin by May's friends, Rutter, Fanshawe, and Jonson, as well as by the scholars Heinsius and Boxhornius. Anthony à Wood, writing after the Restoration, admitted grudgingly that it was

> written in so lofty and happy Latin hexameter that he hath attained to much more reputation abroad than he hath lost at home.[9]

The later history of the work has been remarkable. Reprinted in England alone in 1646, it was thereafter included in all the most important continental editions of the *Pharsalia*, beginning with those of Grotius and the Elzivirs in the latter part of the seventeenth century and ending with the *Bibliotheca Classica Latina* of Lemaire in 1830. Such a distinction is, as far as I know, unique; certainly it has not fallen to the lot of many Latin works

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[9] *Athenae Oxoniensis*, ed. 1817, III, 810.

by modern authors to be included in collections of Roman classics. But May's *Supplementum* has had greater honor even than that. It has been translated into French, and quite early in its career it enjoyed the ultimate distinction of being rendered into Polish.[10]

Critical opinion, on the whole, seems to substantiate the popularity of the *Supplementum*. Dr. Johnson mentioned it as one of the first Latin poems of merit composed in England, and believed it superior to the Latin poetry of either Cowley or Milton:

> —the English, till their [Cowley's and Milton's] works and May's poem appeared, seemed unable to contest the palm with any other of the lettered nations.
>
> If the Latin performance of Cowley and Milton be compared (for *May I hold to be superior to both*) the advantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley.[11]

This is high praise indeed; in it Johnson's contemporary, the distinguished Thomas Warton, did not entirely concur. The latter says in part:

> May is certainly a sonorous dactylist, and was sufficiently accomplished in poetical declamation for the continuation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. But May is scarcely an author in point. His skill is in parody; and he was confined to the peculiarities of an archetype, which, it may be presumed, he thought excellent.[12]

Dr. Johnson was perhaps speaking with his customary largeness and sweep, and Warton was defending a thesis; consequently neither of them is entirely right. But between them they give us the truth concerning May as a writer of Latin verse: first, that he was one of the first and most able of English practitioners in this kind; second, that his verse is an excellent imitation of Lucan's flowing hexameters. Beyond this, perhaps, it is unnecessary to generalize.

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[10] In all there are twelve editions and two translations of the work, not including May's own English version. See Bibliography, p. 193-194.

[11] *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, ed. Phila., 1811. I, 17–18. The italics in the quotation are mine.

[12] *Poems upon Several Occasions, by John Milton*, ed. Thomas Warton, London, 1785. xv.

The English *Continuation*, whether it be the original or the translation of the *Supplementum*, enjoyed an equal popularity in the years immediately following its publication. Its first appearance in 1630 was followed by three editions and reprints down to 1657. Dedicated to the King, as we have seen, it attracted Charles' favorable attention and won for May, according to Clarendon, a considerable donative.[13] Clarendon himself, although he deplored May's political complexion, admitted that the *Supplement*,

> for the learning, the wit, and the language, may be well looked upon as one of the best epic poems in the English language.[14]

George Daniel, whose praise of May's translations has been noted previously, was of the opinion that the *Continuation* was so truly like

> The Roman Genius, as you cannot say,
> This was by Lucan done, or that by May.[15]

Concerning the form of the *Continuation*, the modern student need only note that it is written in the five-stressed rimed couplets which May had used in his translations and which mark him as belonging to the school of Jonson.[16] In content and spirit, the English version is like the Latin. Throughout the work there is a classical restraint in the use of embellishment and at the same time a rapidity of narrative and a rhetorical effectiveness which indicate how thoroughly May had learned to imitate his Roman master.

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[13] See above, p. 45-47.

[14] *Life*, ed. 1827, I, 39–40.

[15] *Poems*, (ed. Grosart), 4 vols., 1878. I, 30.

[16] See F. E. Schelling, *Ben Jonson and the Classical School* (reprinted for *Publications of the University of Pennsylvania* from *PMLA.*, XIII, No. 2). Curiously enough, this form did not please a clerical gentleman of the 18th century, who justified his own translation of the first book of May's *Supplementum* on the grounds that May's own English version was unsuitable to the taste of that refined age. "If Mr. Rowe," says this critic, "did not deem the author's translation of Lucan sufficient, there is at least as much reason to infer the insufficiency of his *Continuation*." Rev. Edmund Poulter, *A Supplement to the Pharsalia of Lucan, Translated from the Latin of Thomas May*, London, 1786. ii-iii.

Written in the same spirit and springing in part from the same antiquarian impulse were May's two poems on English history, *The Reigne of King Henry the Second* (1633) and *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third* (1635). These works, according to their title-pages, were written at the command of the King,[17] who had been pleased with the *Continuation* of Lucan. Whether Charles suggested the subjects, or merely commanded more poems from the pen of Thomas May, does not appear.

In speaking of the *Continuation*, a comparison with other poems on Roman history was impossible, for the simple reason that no such poems existed. Although the drama, as is well known, had dealt largely with Roman themes, the narrative poets of the Elizabethan and Jacobean era had not concerned themselves with Roman history as such.[18] Turning to May's English narratives, we are immediately reminded of a long series of narrative poems on English history, beginning with *The Mirror for Magistrates*, first published in the second year of Elizabeth's reign, and ending with George Daniel's *Trinarchodia, or the Severall Reignes of Richard the Second, Henry the Fourth and Henrie the Fifth*, which appeared in the year of the execution of Charles I. The history of these "epics" is well known. Between the earlier poems of the kind—Warner's *Albion's England* (1586); Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamund* (1592) and *The Civil Wars* (1595, 1609); and Drayton's *Barons' Wars* (1596, 1603), *England's Heroical Epistles* (1597) and his various "legends"—between these and the later poems there is an important difference. The former were inspired by a national pride which had its beginning in the reign of the dynast Henry VIII and reached its zenith in the year of the Armada. By the middle years of the reign of James, this intense national pride had subsided; and later historical verse was as a rule unsuccessful because uninspired. In form, also, the work of most of the later writers is inferior to that of Drayton and Daniel.[19]

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[17] See above, p. 47-48.

[18] One thinks of *The Rape of Lucrece*, of course, but there the interest is not in the history but in the human drama. Nor are the narratives based on the legends of Ovid and similar writers cases in point.

[19] On this whole subject, see F. E. Schelling, *English Literature during the Lifetime of Shakespeare*, Revised Edition, N. Y., 1925. 5–15, 209–214.

With respect to form and style, May's historical poems are equal to the best in the earlier age. Their rimed couplets are as suitable a medium for this kind of writing as the *ottava rima* of Daniel and Drayton, and infinitely superior to the ballad measure of Deloney, the wretched doggerel of John Taylor, and the pedestrian verse of George Daniel. In epic largeness, too, May's poems merit comparison with *The Barons' Wars*. With respect to that other quality of national pride, *Henry the Second* and *Edward the Third* are not entirely deficient. But May's patriotism is not the exultation in present English greatness which characterized Daniel and Drayton. To be sure, he pays frequent compliment to Charles, but it is merely the polite lip-service of a poet to his patron, not the sincere tribute to a Gloriana who has made England great. Instead, May's patriotism is the historian's very sincere love for his country's past—a love which kept him from celebrating in verse the defeats of the latter part of Edward's reign.

> Those great actions of Edward the Third [he wrote to his patron] are the argument of this poem; which is there ended where his fortune began to decline, where the French by revolts and private practises regained that which had been won from them by eminent and famous victories: which times may afford fitter observations for an acute historian in prose, than strains of height for an heroic poem.[20]

It is clear that here, at least, the patriotic impulse has conquered the scholar's love of accuracy and the artist's desire for a finished masterpiece.

But May's love of country took still another form. In both of these poems, there are passages to suggest that the author maintained an uneasy watchfulness over contemporary affairs. That he was too much a republican to be entirely sympathetic with the Stuart doctrine of the divine right of kings is perhaps the implication of that passage in which, telling of the misfortunes which overtook the Black Prince after he had taken up the cudgel in behalf of the Spanish Don Pedro, May comments

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[20] *Edward the Third*, Epistle Dedicatory, Sg. A4r.

> . . . All which was sent
> Perchance to Edward as a punishment
> For aiding such a monster, though true heir.[21]

He may have been disturbed too by the activities of the Roman Catholic faction, for in *Henry the Second*, particularly in those passages telling of the veneration of Becket, he makes frequent satiric comment on "those fooleries that heathens may deride" and upon the worldliness and corruption of the Roman Church. It may be, of course, that there is less significance in these passages than has been suggested; on the other hand, in the light of May's later political affiliations, such conjectures are not entirely absurd. Certainly May was always concerned with England's good, as many a passage indicates. The following lines from *Henry the Second* are characteristic. The news having been brought from England to France that the Princes are at war with each other, Henry thus soliloquizes:

> . . . Oh God, Thou only wise,
> If my intents in England may succeed,
> If her afflicted state my presence need,
> And that my safe arrival there may be
> Her health and cure of all her malady,
> Then grant me passage, Thou, whose only beck
> Has power the winds and swelling seas to check.
> But if my presence to her coast may prove
> More cause of woes, and fiercer tumults move;
> If my revenging hand may lance the sore
> Too deep, and make it greater than before,
> Let those cross winds still keep me from that shore.
> Oh, let me never see my England more,
> Rather than these my arms should only gain
> My right, and not the nation's health maintain.[22]

Although these sentiments are scarcely appropriate to a king who spent two-thirds of his time in France and whose interest

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[21] *Edward the Third*, Book VII. Sg. N2[r].
[22] Book V, Sg. H8[r] & [v].

in England was not entirely selfless, they do reflect the patriotic zeal of the man who imagined them for the king. We may conclude, I think, that while May's patriotism was different in the sources of its inspiration from that of the Elizabethans, it was nevertheless a real and sincere emotion.

But May's interest in the reigns of these old kings must have been, on the whole, less the patriot's than the scholar's. His use of the Roman historians has already been commented upon; and it is not surprising that in these English poems he shows an equal familiarity with the historians of his own country's history. His sources seem to have been, for the most part, the older chroniclers. In *Edward the Third* he went directly to Froissart; in *Henry the Second* to the *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi* of Benedict of Peterborough and the chronicles of Gervaise of Canterbury, as well as to such better known works as Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, Roger de Hovedon's *Chronica*, and William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. These he follows closely; indeed, one commentator was of the opinion that for accuracy May's poems could rival a gazette.[23] But May was anxious to make of these poems something more than mere rimed chronicles, with accuracy and completeness as their chief virtues. This fact is clear from his own remarks on their form and content. The career of Henry II, he says, divides itself into five acts, like a well constructed drama: the first act, or prologue, tells of the unraveling of the tangled skein of affairs which was Henry's legacy from King Stephen: the second act, or the next twelve years of the reign, is concerned with Becket; the third with the revolt of Henry's sons; the fourth with the years of prosperity and peace; the fifth with the revolt of young Henry and Geoffrey, and the death of the King.[24] In working out the poem, too, May seems to have made the attempt to arrange his material with due regard for the rising and falling action of drama. In *Edward III*, he selected his material with even greater attention to its suitability for poetic narrative, and eliminated much

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[23] Henry Headley, *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*, 2 vols., London, 1787.

[24] See the prose "Description of King Henry the Second," Sg. N1r-O1v.

social history which, whatever its importance to the historian, was scarcely the stuff of poetry.

In *Henry the Second*, however, that side of May which was sober historian seems to have been at war with that side of him which was a poet. The poem contains, therefore, much that is not glamorous. It includes a discussion of the establishment of national unity and of a sound system of laws and law-courts, and of political (as opposed to merely military) difficulties with France, Ireland, and the Church. Particular attention is paid to the later history of the reign, especially to Henry's difficulties with his sons. The work concludes with an account of the wars between Richard and young Henry, of the latter's death from dysentery, of Prince John's maladministration of Irish affairs, of Richard's making common cause with France against his father, and of the King's ultimate death from a broken heart.

As a poet, however, May must have found relief from much of the tedium of the bare facts of history in the two most interesting episodes in Henry's personal life—the affair with Rosamund Clifford and the tragic murder of Becket at the king's inadvertent suggestion. These he chronicled with considerable fullness. In dealing with the former, May was repeating material already familiar to English readers in Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamund* and in one of the best of Drayton's *Heroical Epistles*. May's treatment of the story, however, is effective, particularly the concluding scenes in which the jealous Queen Eleanor forces Rosamund to drink the poisoned cup in spite of the young woman's piteous cries for mercy. In writing of the Becket episode, May dealt with a subject which other writers of the age had studiously avoided, no doubt because of the religious uncertainties of the time. In *Henry the Second* the career of Becket is recounted in detail, from its inception to the murder of the great archbishop in the transept of Canterbury Cathedral. The story of the murder itself is narrated with a full sense of dramatic values and with a justifiable artistic elaboration, as is also the account of the journey of the repentant Henry, barefoot and submissive to the scourging of the monks, to the shrine of the martyred saint.

As if Becket and the fair Rosamund were not enough to give

poetic life to his chronicle, however, May interpolated a number of passages which are scarcely justified artistically. The whole second book is given over to an account of the visit of Enyo to the cave of the Fiend, where the war goddess and Lucifer discuss the affairs of England and France, and resolve on ways and means to disrupt the peace which Henry has established in his realm. Equally curious, but easier to explain, is the account of a dream of Henry's, in which Pallas urges the king to conquer Ireland and gives him a glimpse of the future—the triumphs at Agincourt and Crécy, the greatness of Elizabeth's reign, the union of England and Scotland under James, and the ultimate splendor of Charles, "A King in Virtue and in Royalty." Most astonishing of all these interpolations, however, is the Bishop of Dublin's long-winded address to the king concerning the wonders of Ireland. Henry hears of a region where no female creature can live; of another where no one can die; of a third, in Connaught, where a dead body cannot putrefy and where consequently children are able to gaze on the faces of their remote ancestors; of a fountain in Munster whose water turns the hair gray, and of another in Ulster which prevents hoary locks; of a meadow in Connaught infested with fleas; of a willow-tree in Glindelachan that bears apples; finally of the nine caves of St. Patrick's Purgatory.[25] The reader is as surprised as Henry at these marvels, and wonders why May included them in his otherwise sedate historical poem.

Edward the Third is at once inferior and superior to *Henry the Second* as history. The solemn student will find no social or ecclesiastical history; although the Black Death is mentioned, he will search in vain for any consideration of the growing class consciousness of the period, or of the struggles with the Church and the incipient Protestantism growing from them. Such omissions, of course, are of small consequence in a work of this kind. On the other hand, the reader will find few unhistorical additions. In the battles of the first half of the Hundred Years War there was poetic material enough, and no need for fanciful

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[25] All these details May found in the *Topographia Hibernica* of Giraldus Cambriensis.

embellishments. To be sure, there are two "visions" in almost the medieval manner: in one, two nymphs appear to the Black Prince, one urging him to voluptuousness, the other to duty; in the other vision, the King is warned that Scotland cannot be conquered, but that the northern kingdom will be united to England through the noble house of Stuart. But apart from these brief excursuses, May adheres closely to his main theme. Beginning with an account of the murder of Edward II, the story proceeds rapidly to the naval battle of Sluys. Following an account of the seige of Tournay and the truce which prevented a pitched battle there, the scene shifts to England, and we are regaled with a description of the great tournament at Windsor at which William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury and newly created King of the Isle of Man, lost his life. We are told, too, of the establishment of the Order of the Garter. Continuing with the renewal of the wars in France, May gives us an interesting account of the battle of Crécy and of the siege of Calais. After a brief summary of the Scottish wars, including the battle of Neville's Cross and the capture of King David, the story concerns itself with the affairs of the Black Prince—the glorious victory at Poictiers and the efforts of the prince and his father to reinstate the wicked Don Pedro on the throne of Spain. With the English victory over the Spanish, the poem closes.

From the preceding analysis, however, it must not be thought that May's poem is a severely historical chronicling of events. A dramatist by inclination, May gave himself free reign in elaborating those episodes which have, together with a solid basis in history, human values with an interest for the ordinary reader. Such episodes are the meeting between Edward and Philip of France in the cathedral at Amiens; the noble efforts of Jane de Valois, mother of Edward's queen but latterly a nun, to effect a truce between the warring kings of England and France; the heroic self-sacrifice of the burghers of Calais; the Black Prince's love for the Countess of Kent; finally, the more theatrical if less dramatic accounts of the battles at Crécy and Poictiers. May's handling of these episodes is effective, and gives to the poem a high degree of readability. One short passage will illustrate this point. Edward's ultimatum has been delivered

to Calais, and Eustace, one of the burghers, urges his fellows to join him in saving the city:

> Since, countrymen, you know King Edward's doom,
> Let me be bold to claim my proper room.
> The wealthiest men must suffer; nor will I
> Strive now to hide that wealth and dignity
> That made me honor'd in our peaceful time,
> Nor e'er be guilty of so foul a crime
> As not to come a willing sacrifice
> For all. I thank the English king in this,
> That, though a general pardon he deny,
> He is so just in his severity
> To make those men, that most indebted were
> Unto their country, pay the most for her.
> . . . . . .
> But to the nobler rank of burgesses
> Though death be nearer, yet our fears are less.
> Election's left to us, and power to make
> That vantage thence, which others cannot take.
> For we gain honour if we freely die,
> And not abandon this brave liberty:
> If we refuse, their deaths will be the same
> With ours; and yet no choice to purchase fame
> Is given to them. We ought our lives to give
> In gratitude for this prerogative.[26]

There is not the imagination of fine poetry in this passage, but there is dignity and effectiveness. It is a fair sample of the greater part of May's narrative.

Comparing *Henry the Second* and *Edward the Third*, it is difficult to say which of the two poems is the better. The interpolations are, on the whole, a defect in the former; on the other hand, the accounts of Becket and fair Rosamund are superior to anything in *Edward the Third*. The former poem, too, by the very nature of the events chronicled, is less episodic than the latter. On the other hand, the general poetic quality of *Edward the Third* is superior to that of its predecessor; the texture of the

[26] *Edward the Third*, Book IV. Sg. H5ᵛ-H6ᵛ.

writing is more consistently good, the interest of the narrative more sustained. Certainly, as has been pointed out, the thrilling events of Edward's reign are more nearly the stuff of poetry than Henry's comparatively prosaic, but more important, efforts to lay the foundations for a great nation.

When we come finally to estimate the literary value of these works—the *Continuation* of Lucan as well as the English histories—we are confronted at once with the old debate as to whether historical narrative, or any story for that matter, can achieve the condition which we commonly call poetry. In such narrative, if it has any pretension to accuracy, so much which is merely factual must be included, that there will inevitably be frequent and extensive stretches of arid gazetting which have no claim to literary merit. Even the greatest works in this kind are great not because there are no such stretches, but in spite of them. The chronicle plays of Shakespeare, for example, are impressive only where they transcend history, or where characterization triumphs over chronicle, or where patriotism becomes an authentic human emotion, as in the famous speech of John of Gaunt in *Richard II*, —in short, only where Shakespeare breathed his enlivening spirit into the older plays which he remodeled; for the rest, there is much that is mere episode, important for the sake of accuracy and completeness, certainly not for the sake of poetry. The necessarily episodic quality of the material precludes also anything in the nature of form in the larger aspects of chronicle plays or poems.

From these weaknesses common to the type all three of May's narrative poems suffer. It would be folly to pretend that they are entertaining from cover to cover; they are not. On the other hand, as has been pointed out, there are frequent passages of narrative which are not deficient either in emotional grasp or in appropriateness of language. Although these passages are not greatly poetic, they are interesting and sometimes stirring. If I may voice a personal opinion, I have read these poems with as much enjoyment as I have found in similar poems of Drayton, and more than I have found in Samuel Daniel. Nor is

this opinion the warped judgment of a biassed critic.[27] May's poems move with greater rapidity than Drayton's, and they are more energetic—more *masculine*, if the word be not inappropriate, —than Daniel's. For this quality of energy, May's historical narratives were no doubt indebted to Lucan who, if he was not their "only begetter," at least shared that honor with King Charles. The *Continuation* of Lucan enjoyed a deserved popularity in its day, and is consequently worthy of our respect. Neither *The Reigne of King Henry the Second* nor *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third* has been reprinted, nor is it likely that they would find many readers if they were to be honored in modern editions. But as the worthy—and almost last—successors of the popular patriotic poems of the age of Elizabeth, they deserve at least the passing attention of the student of literature.

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[27] It seems to have been shared by two old anthologists. Henry Headley included more than twenty pages of quotations from *Henry the Second* and *Edward the Third* in his *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*, 2 vols., London, 1787; and Sir Egerton Brydges, in his *Censura Literaria* (10 vols., London, 1809) gave more space to May than to either Drayton or Daniel.

VIII

Political Writings

After his failure to secure the laureateship upon the death of Ben Jonson in 1637, May devoted less time than formerly to the profession of authorship, which, according to his own account, had brought him nothing but "lean and hungry bays."[1] This, at least, appears to have been the case, for there is no record of any writing from his pen between 1635, the year in which his poem *The Victorious Reigne of King Edward the Third* appeared, and 1640, when the *Supplementum Lucani* was printed in Amsterdam. The nature of his activity during this interval is uncertain: perhaps part of it was devoted to translating the *Continuation of Lucan* into Latin;[2] perhaps also, as has been suggested, he engaged to some extent in the anonymous pamphleteering which was at that time being multiplied by increasingly rancorous political feelings. After the open breach between King and Parliament, however, and his definite espousal of the cause of reform, May renounced poetry for good and all, and turned his attention exclusively to the composition of political tracts. These, together with his reputation as an historian and a Latinist, brought him, as we have seen, to the favorable attention of the Parliament and secured for him, in 1645, the appointment as Secretary and historian of that body; thereafter, he frequently appeared in print as the semi-official apologist of the party of Hampden and Pym.

With May's political writings this chapter is concerned. To be sure, literature of this sort, which makes no pretension to the condition of art, falls more properly within the province of the historian than within that of the student of literature. May's work in this kind must be considered here, however, partly because some knowledge of it is necessary to a rounded view of the man and his work; but even more because May is best

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[1] See above, p. 56.
[2] See above, p. 156.

remembered as an historian and because his *History of Parliament*, following as it did upon his political tergiversation and apparent disloyalty to the King, brought down upon him the wrath of his enemies in the form of calumniation which has survived the years and obscured the obvious merit of his other works.

Before we consider these writings, however, it is necessary to dispose of three small pamphlets which have been attributed to May upon the slenderest of evidence—*The Character of a Right Malignant* (1644), *The Changeable Covenant* (1650), and *The Life of a Satyricall Puppy Called Nim, by T. M.* (1657). All of these works are accredited to May in the catalogue of the British Museum, and his authorship of all three has been called into question.[3] *The Character of a Right Malignant*, consisting of one quarto gathering, is a rather bitter description of the "malignants" who supported the King and attempted to hinder the Parliament at all points. Unfortunately, both title-page and colophon are missing from the copy among the Thomason Tracts;[4] but a contemporary manuscript note states that it was "Written by Mr. Thom: May." The principal reason for doubting May's authorship lies in the fact that the direct attack upon the Malignants is contrary to the method used by May in his known writings. In like manner, no author is mentioned on the printed title-page of *The Changeable Covenant*, but an eighteenth-century hand has added the note, "by Thomas May, Esq." There are two reasons for questioning this statement: first, the date, 1650, is the same as that of May's death, and in the months immediately preceding his sudden demise May was busy with the English and Latin versions of his *Breviary of Parliament;* second, the hostility towards the Scots is directly opposed to the friendliness towards them which is to be found in the *History of Parliament.* It is possible, therefore, to question with some cogency May's authorship of both these pamphlets; in any case, they are so slight as to require no further attention. Concerning *The Life of a Satyricall Puppy Called Nim*, we can

[3] See Professor Firth's article in *D. N. B.*

[4] I know of no other copy save this one, which is, of course, in the British Museum.

speak with even more certainty. The "T. M." of the title-page is not Thomas May; once more, the only reason for attributing to him is an eighteenth-century notation—"(Tho. May?)"—in the British Museum copy. Here, however, a categorical denial is possible. The work was not printed until seven years after May's death; it was dedicated to George, Duke of Buckingham, to whom May was unlikely to dedicate any work written after 1640; it is a gross and ribald satire on London life, entirely unlike anything else that May wrote; finally, it is written in atrocious prose of a sort May was incapable of writing.

If these pamphlets be eliminated from our discussion, as also his anonymous and therefore unidentifiable contributions to *Mercurius Britannicus* and other weeklies and "diurnals"[5] must be eliminated, the name of Thomas May still attaches to four minor bits of political writing which appeared before his more important histories. One of these, *A True Relation from Hull* (1643), has already been discussed;[6] it is merely descriptive, and interesting only because it seems to indicate that May was at Hull when that city was besieged by the King's forces. Two others—*The King's Cabinet Opened* (1645) and *The Lord George Digby's Cabinet and Dr. Goff's Negotiations* (1646)—were collections of letters published by the Parliament, for which May, with his fellow secretary, Sadler, acted merely as editor. The former work, in which the Parliament, with questionable taste, published the letters taken from the King at Naseby field, contains an introduction apparently by May, in which the perfidy of the King, as revealed in the correspondence, is pointed out, with the hope that

> the drawing of this curtain may be as fatal to popery, and all antichristian heresy here now, as the rending of the veil was to the Jewish ceremonies in Judea, at the expiration of our Saviour.[7]

More particularly the work of May, although scarcely more

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[5] See above, pp. 64-65.
[6] See above, pp. 63-64.
[7] See the *Harleian Miscellany*, Vol. V, London, 1810, 516.

important, is *A Discourse Concerning the Success of Former Parliaments* (1642), which was perhaps written at the command of the Parliament (although at that time May apparently had no official connection with that body) or at least in conformity to Parliament's recognized policy of attempting to justify itself in terms of precedent.[8] As its name implies, this pamphlet concerns itself with the past as a moral guide for the present. Indirectly, it is a plea for the English people to be patient with the protracted and difficult labors of the Long Parliament; more directly, it attempts to show, with particular reference to the reigns of Edward II and Richard II, that no English king had been able to rule successfully without the aid of Parliament, and, conversely, that every good king has taken full advantage of Parliament's counsel and support. It will be sufficient criticism of this work, perhaps, to mention the moderation of its tone and the logical truth of its general propositions, however historians may fall out concerning the efficacy of the Great Council in the time of the Angevins and the Plantagenets.

Had May's political writings been limited to these short pamphlets and others like them, his work for the Parliament would have been forgotten and his later reputation unattacked by the Royalists. At the command of the Parliament, however, he published in 1647 *The History of the Parliament of England which began November the third M. DC. XL. With a short and necessary view of some precedent yeares*, a large folio volume running to some 360 pages; this was followed in 1650 by the *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium* and its translation, *A Breviary of the History of the Parliament of England. Expressed in Three Parts*, an octavo volume of 215 pages.[9] These

[8] The antiquarian Oldys commented on the piece as follows: "This pamphlet was written with a very good design; to shew the esteem that English Parliaments were anciently held in, without, as the author professes, any reflection upon the proceedings of the present Parliament; and yet thereby to induce his Majesty to pay such regard thereto, as might still keep the grand Convention in its due esteem and efficacy . . . This copy had heretofore been in the collections of Sir Symonds D'Ewes; and he has written upon the title-page of it, that it is a *notable* piece." *A Compleat and Exact Catalogue of All the Pamphlets Contained in the VIII Volumes of the Harleian Miscellany.* London, 1746; 67.

[9] These volumes will be hereafter designated merely as the *History* and the *Breviary*, respectively.

works, semi-official in their nature, attracted much attention in their own day, particularly from the party of the opposition, and they have been the subject of frequent comment since. The former, moreover, is the best known of May's works in any kind. They must therefore be scrutinized with reasonable closeness in this study of May's writings.

Although they differ from each other in spirit and intention, the *History* and the *Breviary* present a fairly detailed account of the Civil Wars down to the battle of Preston in August, 1648, when Cromwell defeated the Scottish army under Hamilton. The *History*, indeed, begins with the reign of Elizabeth, and points out that in her reign English prosperity had reached its "Acme;" thereafter, by the judgment of God, the fortunes of the state began to decline. Although King James, Elizabeth's successor, was a wise and learned prince, he made the mistake finally of parleying with Rome—

> What the reasons of it were [says May] I will not at all presume to deliver my opinion, though some have been bold to write and publish of late years, that it was fear for his own person, . . . considering the boldness of Jesuitical assassins: others more candidly conceived it might be his great desire for peace and union with other princes, though he might err in the means of attaining that end; for he was by nature a great seeker of peace, according to that motto which he ever used *Beati Pacifici*.[10]

The principal blight on James' reign, however, had been the influence of his favorite, the Duke of Buckingham; and Charles, upon his succession, had unfortunately seen fit to continue the Duke in his place of intimacy and power, and had permitted him to lead the ill-fated expedition against Rochelle in 1627. The death of Buckingham, at the hands of Felton, might have cured the ills of the kingdom, had Charles put his affairs in the hands of competent advisors; but almost at once the King inaugurated the personal government which was to lead to his downfall.

With these preliminary matters out of the way, May proceeds to relate the grievances of the kingdom during the early years of

[10] *History*, I, 5. Page references are to the first edition of 1647.

Charles' reign. To recount them here would be merely to go over material familiar to every schoolboy—the matters of the monopolies, of ship-money, of fees in default of knighthood; of the King's dealings with Rome, of the Scottish prayer-book, and of the Covenant and its consequents; of the Short Parliament and the beginning of the Long; of the misdemeanors of Laud, Windebank, Finch, and particularly Strafford; of the latter's trial and death.[11] It is interesting to note the manner in which May tries to justify the recitation of these corruptions in terms of classical precedent:

> But to be silent in that [a nation's crimes], were great injustice and impiety toward God, to relate his judgments upon a kingdom, and forget the sins of that kingdom, which were the cause of them. The heathen historians do well instruct us in that point of piety; who never almost describe any civil war, or public affliction, without relating at the beginning, how vicious and corrupt their state was at that time grown; how faulty both the rulers and people were, and how fit to be punished, either by themselves or others. . . . And shall we Christians, who adore the true God, and live under the Gospel-light not be sensible under so heavy a judgment of our own offenses?[12]

To the modern reader, to whom the corruptions of Charles' reign are remote and impersonal, such a justification as this may seem far-fetched and unnecessary; it must be kept in mind, however, that the Parliament and its official spokesmen, up to the time of the rise of the Independents, walked very circumspectly in the matter of justifying their charges against the King.

In the second book of the *History*, May concerns himself with the more direct causes of the outbreak of hostilities between King and Parliament. He tells in great detail of the massacre of the Irish Protestants,[13] and of the obstructions placed in the way of the relief of Ireland, apparently by the King. There follows an account of the Grand Remonstrance; of the Queen's journey to Holland with the crown jewels; of the King's journey to the north; of the siege of Hull. The book concludes with an

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[11] See Book I, 15–19.

[12] *History*, I, 15–16.

[13] His account is based largely on the relation of those troubles by Si John Temple.

analysis of the counties of England with respect to their political affiliations, and a statement concerning the formation of parties and armies, and the appointment of Essex as Lord-General of the Parliamentary forces. In the third book, forsaking the Parliament, which was the titular theme of the work, May deals almost exclusively with the actual warfare. Beginning with an account of the battle of Edge Hill (which he consistently calls the battle of "Keynton"[14]), May tells in detail of the skirmishes, sieges and battles of the First Civil War, as well as the parleyings between King and Parliament which marked the early stages of the rebellion. With a gloomy picture of the low condition of the Parliament at the time of the siege of Gloucester, and an account of the revival of spirit following the glorious victory at Newbury, *The History of the Parliament* closes.

May intended, evidently, to publish a continuation of the History which would bring the narration of events down to the date of writing.[15] That intention he did not live to fulfil. *The Breviary of The History of Parliament*, however, which was published in 1650, serves in one sense as a continuation of the *History*. The first part of this latter work chronicles the same events which were related in the *History;* indeed, numerous passages are couched in language identical with that of the *History*, so that there can be no doubt that May wrote the second work with the earlier book before him. Part II of the *Breviary*, however, is entitled "A Short Mention of the Progress of this Civil War," and carries the narrative from the Royalist successes of 1643, through the New-Modeling of the Parliamentary army, the battle of Naseby, and the subsequent surrender of Royalist strongholds, down to the intra-Parliamentary struggles between Presbyterians and Independents. Part III, "A compendious relation of the Original and Progress of the Second Civil War," begins with an account of the negotiations with the King in September 1647, and continues with the minor Parliamentary victories of 1648, the battle of Preston, and the last negotiations with Charles. At the end, May tells of the agitation for the death

[14] Modern maps give both Kineton and Kington as the name of the village.
[15] ". . . there may be a larger discourse [of certain omitted episodes] in the continuation of this Hisotry." III, 115.

of the King, but he stops short of an account of the actual execution.[16]

In the preceding description of the *History* and the *Breviary*, the two works have been discussed as a continuous narrative. From the point of view of events they can be so regarded; with respect to spirit and interpretation, however, there is an important distinction between the two books. The *History* is written with an air of impartiality.

> I will only profess [May writes] to follow that one rule, Truth, to which all the rest . . . may be reduced, against which there are many ways, beside plain falsehood, whereby a writer may offend. Some historians, who seem to abhor direct falsehood, have notwithstanding dressed Truth in such improper vestments, as if they brought her forth to act the same part that falsehood would; and taught her by rhetorical disguises, partial concealments, and invective expressions, instead of informing, to seduce a reader, and carry the judgment of posterity after that bias which themselves have made. . . . This fault I have endeavored to avoid.[17]

Accordingly, May endeavors in the *History* to suppress all direct expressions of personal opinion; as far as possible, he tells his story by quotation from the official proclamations and manifestoes of both parties. In the *Breviary*, on the other hand, there is less indirection, and more outspoken criticism of Charles and his advisers. Moreover, there is a definite partisanship towards the Independents. The ruin of the Parliament, he says,

> seemed to be the wish of those whom they called Presbyterians, who were ready to sacrifice themselves and their cause to their hatred against the Independents.[18]

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[16] Guizot (*Monk's Contemporaries*, London, 1851, p. 67) suggested that the *Breviary* breaks off abruptly because May was sick of the partiality it contained (see below, p. 181) and because to a man of his moderation and fairness there was a limit even to party loyalty. A less ingenious, perhaps more matter-of-fact, suggestion, is that May had brought his narrative down to the date of writing, and that his death in the following year prevented any continuation.

[17] *History*. Preface, Sg. A3 r & v.

[18] *Breviary*, ed. Francis Maseres, in *Select Tracts Relating to the Civil Wars in England*, 2 vols., London, 1815. I, 113. (Subsequent page references to the *Breviary* will be made from this edition.)

This discrepancy in tone between the *History* and the *Breviary* is not difficult to explain. The former was written before 1647, when the Parliament was anxious to justify itself in the eyes of those sober-minded citizens who were still hovering between traditional loyalty to the King and adherence to the cause of reform; the *Breviary*, on the other hand, was written when the Independents had mounted the saddle and were equally anxious to justify their own particular kind of factionalism. Since both works were in a large measure semi-official pronunciamentos of the Parliament, each takes its tone less from the author than from the group which ordered it to be written. As Secretary, with his livelihood perhaps dependent on his continuance in office, May had little choice in determining the nature of his writings. It lies to his credit, however, that there is less discrepancy between the two books than under the circumstances might be expected. In the *Breviary*, although it is an avowed partisan work, there are no unreasonable charges against the King, and there is no vituperation. May even refuses to express an opinion concerning the justice of the execution of Charles, and it is clear that he did not agree with Cromwell that it was necessary to "cut off his head with the crown upon it." With respect to his own party, May is reasonably consistent. Fairfax was his hero in the *History*, and is still so in the *Breviary;*[19] Cromwell is lauded in the latter work, but May had given him equal praise in the History, at a time when the future Protector was still plain Colonel Cromwell.[20] We may conclude, I think, that although in both these works May succeeded in pleasing his masters in Parliament, he succeeded also in steering a middle course which was consistent with his own honesty and moderation of temper.

It has been said above that May's *History of Parliament* was written with an air of impartiality. Impartial, of course, it is not; nor could it, considering its nature, be expected to be. To suppose that a work written at command of Parliament, by a sympathizer with Parliament, would not favor that body at the

[19] See especially p. 66.
[20] *History*, III, 79 ff.

expense of the Royalists, is to exhibit a child-like faith in the existence of a millenial goodness which certainly had not yet come to earth at the time of the Civil Wars. May himself was quite aware that his *History* was less a history than a statement of the case for the Parliament, and that he would be accused by his enemies of partiality and bias. In his Preface, he wrote as follows:

> . . . it is my misfortune to undertake such a subject, in which to avoid partiality is not very easy. But to escape the suspicion or censure of it is almost impossible for the clearest integrity that ever wrote. . . . My residence hath been, during these wars, in the quarters, and under the protection of the Parliament; and whatsoever is briefly related of the soldiery . . . is according to that light which I discerned there . . . to whom [the Parliament], as I have endeavoured to give no more than what is due, so I have cast no blemishes on the other; nor bestowed any more characters, than what the truth of story must require. If those that write on the other side will use the same candour, there is no fear but that posterity may receive a full information concerning the unhappy distractions of these Kingdoms.[21]

This seems to be a frank statement of May's position; he did not pretend for a moment that he was treating these matters with remote impersonality, or that he was not taking sides. His only claim was that he was not unfair to the King's party and that he had not falsified the facts.

The fact remains, however, that in his *History* May professed an impartiality which the work did not in reality possess. A reason for this has been suggested above—that the book was propaganda, written at the direction of the Parliament, and designed for a particular group of readers. Whether or not there is a fundamental dishonesty in the writing of war-time propaganda of this sort is an ethical question which the present writer does not feel called upon to answer. A modern French critic seems to think that there is;[22] and this view is also held by Professor Firth, who says that May's contemporaries [i. e., his *Royalist* contemporaries] "*justly* regarded him as neither honest

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[21] *History*, preface, Sg. A3^{r}, B2 ^{r} & ^{v}.

[22] Guizot (*op. cit.*, 70), who uses such unpleasant terms as "palliation," "dissimulation," and "hypocrisy."

nor impartial."[23] On the other hand, in view of the fact that propaganda has in all ages—including our own—been an accepted weapon of warfare, there is at least some extenuation to be offered for the propagandist who believes in the cause he attempts to promote. There is no good reason to suppose that May's sympathy with Parliament was not rooted in personal conconviction; and if we grant this premise, there is no reason to question his personal integrity. Moreover, it is difficult to understand to what degree May's mildness—whether real or assumed—towards Charles and his party, and his tempered praise of Fairfax, Cromwell, Pym, and Hampden, is less honest than, let us say, Clarendon's outspoken misrepresentations of the character of Hampden or his absurd eulogies of Strafford and Laud.[24] Certainly a modern reader will turn with relief from the extravgances of other writers on both sides to the temperateness of May's narrative.

When we attempt to judge May's work as a history—that is, with respect to the accuracy of its facts,—we are immediately confronted with the problem of picking our way through the amazing complexities of Stuart history. The problem is further obscured by the fact that even today all the issues of the Parliament's quarrels with the King are only imperfectly known or understood, and that modern historians—who might be expected to be, but are not, impartial—by no means agree. May's principal theses are that the King, almost from the time of his accession, exceeded his prerogatives and consequently usurped the traditional rights of Parliament; that he sympathized with the Roman Catholic faction; finally, that his party was directly responsible for the outbreak of armed warfare. Concerning the first two of these charges, few modern historians will disagree; indeed, both contentions are amply supported by documentary evidence. Concerning the last, the modern authority will judge in terms of his own personal feeling; certainly it is difficult to say which party first thought of recourse to arms in those days when fear and rage ran high on both sides. With regard to more

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[23] *D. N. B.*, article on May.

[24] See particularly his *History of the Rebellion*, ed. Oxford, 1816. Vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 253, 289 ff; and II, pt. 2, 722.

specific facts, May's history is uniformly accurate; to deny them categorically, as did Roger Coke in his *Detection of the Court and State of England*,[25] is to be absurd. As a matter of fact any deliberate falsehood on May's part would have defeated the whole intention of the book; for its readers were men who had personal knowledge of the events chronicled and who would have been quick to detect and resent any inaccuracies of fact.[26] We must conclude, in fairness to May, that as far as lay within his knowledge he dealt in neither falsehood nor fiction.

It is no more than natural that contemporary criticism of the *History* and the *Breviary* was based less upon the accuracy of their facts than upon the partisan feeling of the critics. The Royalists, of course, dealt with the work severely. To the journalists of the King's party, May was a "rare half-penny historian," and included in the same condemnation with Sprigge, Fairfax's chaplain and semi-official historian;[27] and later doings of the Parliament are referred to satirically as "worthy to be recorded to posterity, especially in Tom May's History."[28] The Duchess of Newcastle, resentful of May's device of exalting Cromwell by praising the men whom he conquered at Marston Moor, wrote vitriolically:

> This book would, however, have been a great volume, if his grace would have given me leave to publish his enemy's actions. But being to write of his own only, I do it briefly and truly; and not as many have done who have written of the late Civil War, with but few sprinklings of truth, like as heat drops upon a dry barren ground; knowing no more of the transactions of those times, than what they learned in the gazettes, which, for the most part (out of policy to amuse and deceive the people) contain nothing but falsehoods and chimeras; and were such parasites, that after the King's party was overpowered, the government among the rebels changing from one faction to another, they never missed to exalt highly the merits of the chief commanders of the then prevailing side, comparing some of them to Moses, and some others to all the great and most famous heroes, both Greeks and Romans.[29]

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[25] Second edition, London, 1696, II, 135 ff., where he denies not only May's interpretation of facts but in some cases the facts themselves.

[26] As a matter of fact, all the severest attacks came after the Restoration; and in none of them, except Coke's, is there any specific denial of fact.

[27] See *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, Number 19, London, 1648, Sg. T4^{v}.

[28] *Mercurius Elencticus* (from Friday, 29 Oct., to Friday, 5 Nov. 1647), London, 1647, pp. 3–4.

[29] *Life of the Duke of Newcastle*, preface, lviii-lix.

Less indirect, if no more just, than this feminine attack is Clarendon's outspoken assertion that May had

> prostituted himself to the vile office of celebrating the infamous acts of those who were in rebellion against the king; which he did so meanly, that he seemed to all men to have lost his wits when he left his honesty . . .[30]

The writers on the Parliamentary side naturally take the opposite view. To mention just one of them, Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson not only based the historical material in her biography of her husband upon May's *History*, but commented on the work in terms of praise:

> In conducting the state of England, in those days, wherein he, whose actions I am tracing, began to enter into his part in this great tragedy, I have been too long for that I intended, and too short to give a clear understanding of the righteousness of the parliament's cause; which I shall desire you to inform yourselves better of by their own printed papers; and Mr. May's history, which I find to be impartially true, so far as he hath carried it on, saving some little mistakes in his own judgment and misinformations which some vain people gave of the state, and more indulgence to the king's guilt than can justly be allowed.[31]

Although Mrs. Hutchinson's assertions are more in accord with actual facts than those of the Royalists, there is no reason to suppose that she was less inspired by partisanship than Clarendon and others who commented unfavorably.

It is interesting to note how partisan criticism of May's *History* continued through the eighteenth century and down until the early years of the nineteenth. Laurence Eachard, the

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[30] *Life*, I, 39–40. We may note here Isaac D'Israeli's comment on Clarendon: "Clarendon's profound genius could not expand into the same feelings. He highly commends May for his learning [in his poems] . . . ; but this great spirit sadly winces in the soreness of his feelings when he alludes to May's 'History of the Parliament' . . . Behold the political criticism in literature! However we may incline to respect the feelings of Clarendon, this will not save his judgment nor his candour. We read May now, as well as Clarendon; nor is the work of May that of a man who 'had lost his wits,' nor is it 'meanly performed.'" ("Quarrels of Authors." In *Miscellanies of Literature*, New Edition, London, 1840; 260.)

[31] *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, 8th edition, London, 1854; 97–98.

Tory historian, speaks of the work as "one of the genteelest and handsomest libels in those times,"[32] although, as the writer on May in the *Biographia Britannica* points out, he did not scorn to purloin material from May's narrative. Thomas Green, writing in 1799 with a Tory bias, believed that May was "ever insinuating the worst construction upon those of the Court."[33] On the other hand, staunch Whigs like William Pitt and Bishop Warburton praised the *History* without stint. The former, in a letter to his nephew, Thomas Pitt (later the Earl of Camelford), wrote:

> I desired you, some time since, to read Lord Clarendon's History of the Civil Wars. I have lately read a much honester and more instructive book, of the same period of history. It is the History of the Parliament, by Thomas May, Esquire. I will send it to you as soon as you return to Cambridge.[34]

Warburton said in one place that the work was

> an extraordinary performance . . . written with great temper, good sense, and spirit

and in another that it is "a just composition according to the rules of history."[35] Finally, a writer in the *Atheneum*, that journalistic outpost of Whiggery, is most outspoken in his assertion that

> We know of but one work of English contemporary history that is not *dashed with lies*, as Dryden expresses it—but one reasonably free from that spirit of party which leads to the concealment of truth, or a misrepresentation of circumstances: we allude to the 'History of the Long Parliament' [sic], by May, the poet and Parliamentary Secretary. . . . But what May could do in those yeasty times, many of our writers, after a lapse of two centuries, cannot do.[36]

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[32] *History of England*, 3rd edition, London, 1920; 686.
[33] *Extracts from the Diary of a Lover of Literature*, Ipswich, 1810; 169–172.
[34] Quoted by Maseres in his 1812 edition of the *History*, Introduction, x.
[35] Letters to Dr. Hurd, also quoted by Maseres.
[36] From a review of Mark Napier's *The Life and Times of Montrose*, in *The Atheneum*, for 26 Dec., 1840, p. 1022.

Perhaps none of these comments is as lacking in bias as their comparatively recent dates would seem to indicate.

From the point of view of the modern student, who remembers that May was merely an employed publicist, the discussion which continued for two hundred years concerning May's Parliamentary writings seems a teapot-tempest indeed. The present writer, who is principally interested in May as a poet and playwright, has no intention of prolonging that discussion by a painful comparison of each point in May's *History* with the corresponding point in other histories and in official documents. To do so would consume precious space and the reader's more precious time; and the result would scarcely be commensurate with the effort. What has been said above will perhaps be sufficient criticism of May's *History* as a history: namely, that it is a partisan document and was never intended to be anything else, and that no stigma attaches to the writing of such a document if we admit the soundness of war-time expediency which called it into being. I may be permitted to repeat, however, that on the whole May's statement of fact is accurate, and agrees very largely with the facts as presented by Whitelock and Rushworth and by more modern writers.[37] As for his interpretation of fact, one who has succumbed to what Borrow aptly calls "Charlie-o'er-the-waterism" will find much to quarrel with; and one who sees in the Parliament's defiance of the King the keystone of the arch of modern British liberties will whole-heartedly agree.

As to the literary merit of May's historical writings, little need be said. In readability they stand mid-way between Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* (which, it must be admitted even by those who do not sympathize with its author, has a certain depth of feeling and majesty of style which makes it entertaining) and the painful cataloguing of Whitelock's *Memorials* and Rushworth's *Collections*. In those parts of his work which are mere quotation from official papers, May makes no preten-

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[37] It may be pointed out also that at least one modern historian quotes largely from May's *History* and apparently accepts it as a sound reflection of the spirit of its times. See J. A. Marriott (Lecturer and Tutor in Modern History at Worcester College, Oxford), *Life and Times of Lucius Cary Viscount Falkland*, London, 1907.

sion to literary style. On the other hand, where he is writing in his own person, his narrative is skilfully handled and not lacking in interest for the modern reader. Indeed, certain of his accounts of important episodes employ a particularity of detail which lifts them above the dullness of much text-book historical writing. Perhaps the following paragraph descriptive of the trial of Strafford will serve as an example of these points:

> Westminster Hall was the place chosen, where scaffolds were raised on both sides, nine degrees in height; whereof seven were appointed for the members of the House of Commons to sit on. . . . The two upper degrees of the scaffold were appointed for the Commissioners of Scotland, and the Lords of Ireland, who were then come over. In the midst, on a lower ascent, sat the Peers of England. The throne was placed for the King: but the King coming thither (which he did every day of the trial) sat private with the Queen and other ladies in a close gallery, made of purpose to hear the proceedings . . . It seemed a very pleasant object, to see so many Sempronias (all the chief court ladies filling the galleries at the trial) with pen, ink, and paper in their hands, noting the passages, and discoursing upon the grounds of law and state. They were all on his side, whether moved by pity proper to their sex, or by ambition of being thought able to judge of the parts of the prisoner.[38]

The reader will detect, in the latter part of the foregoing passage, more than a hint of the bite of satire; and a similar sharpness is to be discovered in numerous places in the *History*, particularly in some of the thumb-nail sketches of important personages of the time. It is at these points, and in a few of the accounts of skirmishes and battles, that May's narrative has literary interest for the general reader. As a competent writing-man, he did the best he could with the material which the nature of his subject forced upon him; and his style has a certain well-knit compactness which makes for both clarity and rapidity. As a result, it may be said that among the historical documents of the period, May's *History of the Parliament* stands inferior only to Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* with respect to its style and general interest.

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[38] *History*, I, 91–92.

It is to be regretted that this discussion of May's work must be concluded with an account of his histories of Parliament, which, through their very nature, have the least claim of all his writings upon the attention of the student of literature. It is regrettable also that May has been remembered chiefly as an historian, for to dismiss him merely as such is to neglect his very real success in several other forms of literary endeavor. His plays, comedies and tragedies alike, have a quiet distinction which entitles them to a high place among the dramas of the minor playwrights of the age; moreover, the circumstance that in them are strikingly combined the results of the chief influences on the drama of the 'twenties gives those plays an historical interest even greater than that to which their intrinsic merit entitles them. In his translations and historical poems also May achieved a considerable success, and, in the former at least, a considerable esteem among his contemporaries. In his translations, as in his dramas, May followed the teaching of Ben Jonson, and combined with literary skill a sound scholarship which bespeaks his high attainments as a student of the classics. Finally, in his narrative poems on themes from English history, May is worthy of attention both for the patriotism there revealed and for the modest success of his attempt to follow the manner of the classical epic. In all his writings May shows himself a follower of the literary traditions of the immediate past. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not experiment with those new modes of expression in which we now see a foreshadowing of the age which was to come. May was a belated Elizabethan in that he was content to follow the practice of Shakespeare and Jonson, Drayton and Daniel. It is hoped that the reader of this discussion will have found him a worthy, if humble, attendant in the footsteps of those who contributed so much towards making the Elizabethan age the greatest in our literary history.

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2. A True / Relation / from / Hull / of / The Present State and condi-/ tion it is in./ As / It was written in a Letter from thence by one / of good quality, to a Citizen in London,/ being dated the 19th of this instant / Moneth of Septemb. 1643./ Which Letter was brought into / London the twenty eight of this / Moneth.// Ordered to bee Printed.// London,/ Printed by G. Dexter, for Iohn Bull./ Anno 1643. Sept. 30./ 4°. pp. 5.

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(b) [Another edition.]—And Now Reprinted by Robert Wilks, 89, Chancery Lane,/ And Sold by White, Cochrane, and Co. Fleet-Street, London,// 1812. [Folio. With an engraved portrait of May, signed "C. Middlemist, fc." This is an edition by Maseres, who made some alterations in the text.]

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